



Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015–19

BELGIUM

Flemish community



Cedefop monitoring of vocational education and training policies and systems

Progress towards the medium-term deliverables
of the Riga conclusions

Country chapter

FLEMISH COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM

Developments in vocational education and training policy
in 2015-19

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Introduction

In June 2015, the ministers in charge of vocational education and training in the EU Member States, the candidate countries and the European Economic Area countries, convened in Riga, agreed on objectives for vocational education and training (VET) policies for 2015-20⁽¹⁾.

Cedefop has been entrusted with monitoring the countries' policies implemented towards reaching these objectives.

This country chapter is part of the monitoring process. It was drafted based on input from the national ReferNet team. It presents an overview of the major policy developments that have taken place in the country in 2015-19, in the areas covered by the Riga medium-term deliverables (MTDs).

The country chapter is structured as follows:

- (a) the introductory section Aspects of vocational education and training context in 2015 briefly sketches the VET context in the country in 2015, highlighting selected figures and major policy initiatives that were just being adopted or started at that time. This introductory section is targeted at setting a baseline to put in perspective the policy choices and developments that have taken place since the beginning of the Riga cycle;
- (b) five thematic chapters then follow, devoted to the five respective MTDs outlined in the Riga conclusions. Each thematic chapter also begins with a 2015 baseline, more specifically addressing the MTD-related topics. The baseline is followed by the presentation of the major policy developments in the MTD since 2015;
- (c) the country chapter ends with a conclusion summarising the main lines of the 2015-19 policy developments and highlighting possible priorities for the future.

This country chapter is part of the information which the European Commission used to prepare the European Semester exercises⁽²⁾ in 2017-19. It also informs the work of Cedefop and the European Training Foundation (ETF) in preparing a joint monitoring report on the implementation of the Riga conclusions. Both the joint report and the country chapter are aimed at informing the work of EU Member States' Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVTS) and Advisory

(1) *Riga conclusions 2015 on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020, as a result of the review of short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges communiqué:*

https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/RigaConclusions_2015.pdf

(2) European Semester: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en

Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT) on taking stock of the outcomes of the Riga conclusions and preparing the next steps for the EU VET policy for the next few years.

Aspects of vocational education and training context in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, the proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) programmes in Belgium was above the EU average: 59.7% in 2014 compared to 48% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29); 60% in 2015 compared to 47% in the EU ⁽³⁾. However, only 5.9% of upper secondary initial vocational education and training (IVET) students were following work-based programmes in 2014, against 34% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29). The employment rate of recent upper secondary education graduates was also below the EU average: 67.4% in 2014 compared 70.8% in the EU (European Commission, 2015). However, the rate was higher when taking VET graduates only: 75.6% in 2014, compared to the EU average of 73% (European Commission, 2016). Adult participation in lifelong learning was low: 6.9% in 2015 compared to 10.7% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29) (Table 1).

VET in the country was faced with the challenges of addressing early school leaving and resulting NEETs (not in education, employment, or training). On the adult side, a shared focus among all three regions/communities was to provide adults with additional qualifications and recognise their skills. In the Flemish Community, steps were being taken to strengthen work-place learning in school-based VET, introduce dual training, and develop incentives for workers to attend retraining courses.

⁽³⁾ Eurostat, data for 2015.

Table 1. Framework data: score on VET indicators in Belgium and in the EU: 2010-15

Indicator label	2010		2015 (*)		Trend in 2011-15 (per year)		
	BE ^f	EU ^f	Yr	BE ^f EU ^f	Range	BE	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility							
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students	A	A	'14	59.7 ^b 48.0 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ 0.5	▪ -
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET	A	A	'14	5.9 ^b 34.0 ^b _{E2}	'13-'14	▪ 0.0	▪ 0.1
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET			'14	20.9 69.2 ^{E3}	'13-'14	▪ 0.2	▪ -
Employees participating in CVT courses (%)	52.0	38.0 ^e	'10	52.0 38.0 ^e			
Employees participating in on-the-job training (%)	21.0	20.0 ^e	'10	21.0 20.0 ^e			
Adults in lifelong learning (%)	7.4		'15	6.9 10.7 ^b	'13-'15	→ 0.0	→ 0.0
Enterprises providing training (%)	78.0	66.0 ^e	'10	78.0 66.0 ^e			
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students	A	A	'14	58.0 ^b 42.7 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ -	▪ -
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)	34.0	25.0 ^e	'10	34.0 25.0 ^e			
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)			'15	37.7 ^b 33.0 ^b	'14-'15	▪ -	▪ -
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)	4.6	5.3	'15	4.5 6.9	'10-'15	→ 0.0	↗ 0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)	3.2		'15	3.0 ^C 4.3 ^{bC}	'13-'15	→ 0.0	↘ 0.1
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)	9.7		'15	9.0 9.5 ^b	'13-'15	↗ 0.3	↘ 0.4
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)	12.8 ^B	9.5 ^{eB}	'11	12.8 9.5 ^e			
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)	89.3 ^B	80.2 ^{eB}	'11	89.3 80.2 ^e			
Skill development and labour market relevance							
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)			'13	1.18 ^b 0.56 ^b _{E4}			
IVET public expenditure per student (1 000 PPS units)			'13	10.9 ^b 6.4 ^b _{E5}	'12-'13	▪ 0.7	▪ 0.0
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost	0.9	0.8 ^e	'10	0.9 0.8 ^e			
Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET			'14	1.4 ^b 1.0 ^b _{E6}	'13-'14	▪ 0.1	▪ 0.0
STEM graduates from upper secondary IVET (% of total)	A	A	'14	27.3 ^b 30.0 ^b _{E7}	'13-'14	▪ 1.2	▪ -
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates			'14	9.3 ^{E8}			
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)	60.0	41.5 ^{E9}	'12	48.4 41.6 ^{E9}	'10-'12	▪ -	▪ 0.0
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20- to 34-year-olds)			'15	80.8 ^b 77.2 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 0.5	▪ 0.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over general stream)			'15	10.7 ^b 5.3 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 1.9	▪ -

Indicator label	2010		2015 (*)		Trend in 2011-15 (per year)			
	BE ^f	EU ^f	Yr	BE ^f	EU ^f	Range	BE	EU
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)			'15	28.5 ^b	23.7 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 3.2	▪ -0.1
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)			'15	77.3	83.7			
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	61.2	55.2	'15	61.5	57.3	'10-'15	▪ 0.1	▪ 0.4
Overall transitions and labour market trends								
Early leavers from education and training (%)	11.9	13.9	'15	10.1 ^c	11.0 ^c	'10-'15	↘ 0.5	↘ 0.6
30- to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	44.4	33.8	'15	42.7 ^c	38.7 ^c	'10-'15	↘ 0.2	↗ 1.0
NEET rate for 18- to 24-year-olds (%)		16.6	'15	15.5 ^b	15.8	'11-'15	↗ 0.1	↘ 0.3
Unemployment rate for 20- to 34-year-olds (%)		13.1	'15	12.6 ^b	12.9	'11-'15	↗ 0.5	↘ 0.1
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)		77.4	'15	79.5 ^b	76.9 ^c	'11-'15	↘ 0.4	→ 0.0
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)	29.5	27.3	'15	25.3 ^c	23.5 ^c	'10-'15	↘ 0.8	↘ 0.8
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds (%)		68.6	'15	67.2 ^b	70.0	'11-'15	→ 0.0	↗ 0.4
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)		53.4	'15	45.6 ^b	52.6 ^c	'11-'15	↘ 0.4	↘ 0.1
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2020 (% of total)			'16	85.3 ^d	82.8 ^d			

(*) The data in this column are the data available in 2016. Where 2015 data were not available, data from previous years were used.⁽⁴⁾ UOE (UNESCO OECD Eurostat) back reconstruction of 2010 values based on ISCED (international standard classification of education) 2011 not yet available.

^(B) AES (adult education survey) 2011, used as proxy for 2010 baseline.

^(C) 2014 b flags in Eurostat online tables ignored on the basis of other relevant Eurostat metadata.

^(D) Forecast made in 2016.

^(E1) Based on 28 countries; partial information for NL.

^(E2) Based on 25 countries (missing: ES, PL, RO); partial information for NL.

^(E3) Based on 27 countries (missing: NL); partial information for EL, IT.

^(E4) Based on 19 countries (missing: BE, DK, IE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PT, SK).

^(E5) Based on 21 countries (missing: DK, IE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PT).

^(E6) Partial information for NL.

^(E7) Based on 25 countries (missing: HR, IT, UK).

^(E8) Based on 23 countries (missing: BE, IE, FR, CY, UK).

^(E9) Based on 22 countries (missing: DE, IE, EL, NL, SI, UK).

^(b) Break after 2010, therefore baseline data not included.

⁽⁴⁾ Eurostat: 'low reliability'.

^(c) Eurostat: 'not applicable'.

^(e) Eurostat: 'estimated'.

NB: Definitions in the indicators table differ from those used in national legislation.

EU refers to EU-28, unless otherwise specified. Arrows ↗ or ↘ signal a positive or negative trend based on more than two data points and of magnitude 0.1 per year or more. Trends based on more than two data points but of smaller magnitude are indicated by →; trends based on two points only are marked ▪. Trends are estimated by means of regression models.

Source: Cedefop, 2017a, p. 29.

CHAPTER 1.

MTD 1 – All forms of work-based learning with special attention to apprenticeships

1.1. Baseline 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, initial VET in Belgium included school-based training and apprenticeship. Apprenticeship took place in the workplace and in a training institution, based on a jointly agreed training plan. A training contract was signed by the employer and the apprentice, and the apprentice would receive remuneration.

In the Flemish Community, two apprenticeship systems were in place:

- (a) the apprenticeship system *Leertijd*, organised by SYNTRA Vlaanderen, the Flemish agency for entrepreneurial training. *Leertijd* apprentices would work full-time four days per week and have one-day classes;
- (b) the apprenticeship system DBSO ⁽⁴⁾, taking place in vocational secondary education. DBSO apprentices would receive two-day classes per week along with carrying out activity depending on individual needs for the remaining time, i.e. whether regular workplace practical training or adapted personal development programme.

A reform towards a single new ‘dual learning system’ was undertaken in 2015. In April 2015, the Flemish government approved the resolution for starting pilot projects on dual learning. In July, a decree unifying the study-and-work contract was approved, ensuring equal rights and responsibilities for all students. The unified contract provided a clear framework for quality workplaces.

Cooperation between all VET stakeholders had been a long-standing tradition. Agreements with sectors for work-based learning were in place. VET providers and the employment service used to cooperate to match the needs of the apprenticeship market, for example to organise speed dating between enterprises and young people. Sectors used to fund continuing vocational training in enterprises.

At the beginning of the reporting period, a challenge still to tackle was the dropout from apprenticeship.

⁽⁴⁾ *Deeltijds Beroepssecundair onderwijs* (DBSO): part-time vocational secondary education.

1.2. Policy priorities for 2016-20

For 2016-20, the Community's priorities in this area ⁽⁵⁾, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training (DGVt), are two-fold:

- (a) regarding apprenticeship:
 - i. abolish the two existing apprenticeship systems (DBSO and *Leertijd*) and replace them with one system of dual learning;
 - ii. gradually integrate dual learning (the new apprenticeship model) in full-time vocationally oriented secondary education (TSO, BSO and BuSO);
- (b) regarding work-based learning in school-based VET: stimulate the participation of pupils of full-time vocationally oriented secondary education in work-based learning (traineeships).

1.3. Main actions taken in 2015-19

1.3.1. Piloting dual training

Tackling the objectives mentioned under point (a) above, pilot projects started in the context of the existing apprenticeship systems and schools for full-time vocationally oriented secondary education. In September 2016, 30 schools started piloting dual training programmes: 60% of the programme is carried out in an enterprise. The pilots are planned to last three consecutive school years. A specific regulatory framework was set for the experiment. In September 2017, the number of schools involved in the pilots was increased to 100 in 20 courses. In September 2018, more than 180 schools organised one or more of the 41 available dual courses for more than 1 000 students. Full scale implementation was planned for September 2019. To make this possible, the Flemish government approved a decree on dual learning in March 2018.

1.3.2. Learner status in the dual system

A Decree on the status of learners in the dual system ⁽⁶⁾ was adopted in June 2016 and implemented in September 2016. This decree states that all learners in the dual system have the same status (in terms of social security, rights and obligations, remuneration) and the same contract type. The decree aims to make the dual learning system transparent for all stakeholders involved. It introduces a new body, the Flemish Partnership Dual Learning, in charge of providing the

⁽⁵⁾ According to a survey by Cedefop among Directors General for VET in early 2016.

⁽⁶⁾ <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14994>

government with input in relation to further implementation of dual learning in Flanders. Syntra Vlaanderen, social partners, and government and education stakeholders are part of this body. A framework for the roles and responsibilities of every partner involved is in place. The education provider is fully responsible for students during time at school, while time at the workplace is the responsibility of the company. Syntra Vlaanderen is the 'manager' for workplace training and has a focus on the quality and extension of workplaces. Education providers are responsible for certification.

Following a first evaluation in 2017, small changes were made to the decree. The evaluation also showed that the new contract type had already been used for more than 50% of students during the first school year (2016-17).

1.3.3. Website on dual learning

In June 2016, a website was launched to inform companies about dual learning. At the same time a digital application was launched for matching supply and demand for dual learning; this website is used for the recognition of enterprises and registration of contracts. Learners searching for a work placement can also view company vacancies.

In 2017, the website was updated, with the introduction of geographic modules allowing locating of course offers across regions. In 2018, an additional module was tested, targeted at allowing learners to view work placement offers in companies. The module was expected to be launched in 2019.

1.3.4. Introducing work-based learning into higher education

In March 2016, the Government of Flanders adopted the concept paper *Extending higher vocational education*, aiming to develop higher professionally oriented education (the so-called HBO5 programmes) into a fully-fledged component of higher education (as short-cycle programmes leading to a graduate degree). At least a third of the learning period in this type of programme has to be work-based, which is intended to attract additional students who have not yet found their place in higher education. Full integration of these programmes into higher education will start in the 2019/20 academic year ⁽⁷⁾.

In 2018, the Flemish ESF Agency launched a call for dual training in higher and adult education with a focus on programmes not covered by the above (HBO5/graduate degree) programmes. Trial projects will start in the 2019/20 academic year. The aim is to investigate the success factors and pitfalls, and to

⁽⁷⁾ Decree of 4 May 2018: *Decreet betreffende de uitbouw van de graduaatsopleidingen binnen de hogescholen en de versterking van de lerarenopleidingen binnen de hogescholen en universiteiten.*

propose recommendations for future policy on dual learning in higher education and formal adult education.

1.3.5. Increasing the offer of traineeship places for VET school pupils

Since 2009, the number of pupils in full-time school-based VET at secondary education level (TSO, BSO, *Buitengewoon* SO – OV3) taking up traineeships in enterprises has been monitored each year. Compared to school year 2014/15 the number of pupils is increasing in all three forms of VET. Engagements of more than 30 professional sectors for offering trainee places are part of the sector covenants that were renewed at the end of 2017 for 2018-2019/20. Sector covenants are written agreements between the social partners of a professional sector and the Flemish Government.

CHAPTER 2.

MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to IVET and CVET

2.1. Baseline 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, a quality assurance national reference point had been in place since 2010. A quality assurance approach was also in place. The Decree on quality in education of 8 May 2009 had stipulated that primary and secondary schools were responsible for their own quality and it was part of the school's autonomy to decide how to conduct their self-evaluation. The quality assurance approach thus comprised internal reviews at VET provider level. However, external reviews could also be carried out by the inspectorate. Pedagogical support services assisted schools in strengthening internal quality assurance and their ability to implement policies. As with providers of IVET, CVET providers had to monitor their own quality systematically and had room in deciding on the procedure for it.

Some instruments to identify labour market needs were in place, though not in a systematic way. The Flemish public employment and vocational training service (VDAB) used to carry out studies to identify training needs and bottleneck occupations. It monitored graduates and analysed job vacancies. Insights were also drawn from cooperation with industry. Occupational profiles had also been defined ⁽⁸⁾. The results were used by VDAB, training providers and public authorities to adapt and improve training programmes according to market developments. However, due to privacy legislation, it was not easy in 2015 to cross-reference administrative data on learning pathways with information on labour market participation.

⁽⁸⁾ Using the *Competent* database created by The Flemish Economic and Social Council (SERV). The database itself builds upon the Operational Directory of Professions and Jobs (*Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois – ROME*), which was adapted to the Flemish labour market.

2.2. Quality assurance in line with EQAVET in 2015-19

The Community's priorities in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, are to:

- (a) use professional qualifications (described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence) that are formally linked to the Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) as the reference point for quality assurance in VET;
- (b) ensure the value of professional qualifications delivered inside and outside education;
- (c) enhance permeability between vocational training offered by the Flemish public employment services (PES), SYNTRA *Vlaanderen*, recognised private training providers and education.

On 14 March 2019, the Flemish Parliament approved a new decree on common principles for the quality assurance in VET offered outside formal education but based on a professional qualification description formally linked to the Flemish qualifications framework (*Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur*). The decree prescribes the terms for certifying professional qualifications by regulating the conditions for quality control. Quality control is required to follow a quality assurance framework and be objective and neutral. Training quality is required to be verified at least once every six years. The quality assurance framework was in development and expected to be ready for use in 2019. It will be aligned with the quality assurance framework of the Education Inspectorate used in formal education.

2.3. Continuous information and feedback loops in initial VET in 2015-19

The Community's priority in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, is to enhance quality assurance in IVET schools by providing information on the needs of the labour market and professional careers of school leavers.

In 2017, progress was made towards more easily linking administrative data on learning pathways with information on labour market participation. Based on an agreement between the Flemish PES (VDAB) and the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, schools will receive data not only on the progression of their graduates towards higher education (as was the case so far) but also on the transition of their IVET graduates to the labour market.

The Flemish PES (VDAB) and the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training agreed on a common monitoring profile wherein the number of indicators is increased from two to five. VDAB delivers information on labour market participation of IVET graduates at the level of field of study, to provide information to support the study choice. A pilot with the Belgian Crossroads Bank for Social Security was being carried out in 2019.

CHAPTER 3.

MTD 3 – Access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible/permeable systems, guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

3.1. Baseline 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, all three regions/communities of Belgium were conducting major school reforms (in the Flemish Region, the Flemish government had adopted in 2013 a master plan for a 10-year reform of the secondary education system). At the same time, adult participation was below the EU average (7.1% compared to 10.7% in 2014) (European Commission, 2015), and the communities aimed to provide adults with additional qualifications and recognise their skills (European Commission, 2015) ⁽⁹⁾. The communities had announced measures to revise their education policies and improve basic skills for all, with particular attention to the employability and integration of migrants (European Commission, 2015). They had also committed to implement the recommendation on the *Youth Guarantee*, which had led to an increase in the offer of traineeships targeted at the NEETs ⁽¹⁰⁾. The early school leaving rate was 7.5% in the Flemish Region in 2013 (European Commission, 2015).

Guidance mechanisms were in place, in particular as part of EU projects within which tools and manuals for career guidance as well as learning materials for career management were developed. A reform of guidance and counselling in schools was on hold.

Due to its federal structure, Belgium was faced with the challenge of developing and implementing more than one national qualifications framework ⁽¹¹⁾. The Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) had been adopted by the Flemish

⁽⁹⁾ In Flanders, the Emergency Decree of December 2016 paved the way for creating larger training providers in the adult education sector, so as to broaden the offer and increase quality.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Young people not in education, employment or training.

⁽¹¹⁾ The input is from the European inventory on NQF 2016:
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/belgium-european-inventory-nqf-2016>

Government and the Flemish Parliament in 2009 and referenced to the EQF in 2011 ⁽¹²⁾.

Mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning existed, but an integrated approach to validation was still missing. Quality assurance mechanisms for validation remained to be developed.

3.2. Policy priorities for 2016-20

For 2016-20, the Community's priorities in this area, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, are:

- (a) for young people: to combat early school leaving by making IVET more attractive to young people;
- (b) for adults: to ensure that recognition/validation of non-formal and informal learning (*erkenning van competenties* – EVC) is in place in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

3.3. Main actions taken in 2015-19

3.3.1. National qualifications framework ⁽¹³⁾

With the Act on the qualification structure ⁽¹⁴⁾, the Flemish parliament and government adopted in 2009 a comprehensive qualifications framework based on learning outcomes and covering all types and levels of qualifications from formal education and training and from the professional qualifications system. In 2011, the Flemish qualifications framework was referenced to the EQF and has been populated with qualifications since then. The FQF has been operational since December 2016. By February 2019, the Flemish qualifications database covered a total of 384 professional qualifications (*Beroepskwalificaties*) and 252 educational qualifications (*Onderwijskwalificaties*). Professional qualifications have been levelled individually (as opposed to being placed as a block) in a process involving the main social partners.

⁽¹²⁾ Act on the qualification structure (*Decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur*): <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14111>

⁽¹³⁾ Cedefop, 2017b.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Act on the qualification structure (*Decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur*): <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14111>

3.3.2. Validation ⁽¹⁵⁾

In Flanders, the term EVC (*erkennen van verworven competenties*: recognition of acquired competences) is used to refer to the validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Several types of secondary school certificate (general, vocational/technical, artistic) can be acquired through validation by an exam committee. Occupational qualifications can be acquired through formal and non-formal or informal learning. Developments at policy level in the reporting period aim at an integrated approach to validation, bringing existing separate validation measures together in a single comprehensive strategy. There is increased cooperation between different validation providers (inside as well as outside education) and the willingness to create a single framework linking validation processes to the FQF. In July 2015, the concept for an integrated framework for validation in Flanders was approved by the Flemish government; a task force was set up to develop the integrated policy framework and to draft a decree on validation. A cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken to determine the financial implications of VNFIL in Flanders.

A decree adopted by the Flemish Parliament on 14 March 2019 promotes an integrated policy on validation, regulates the role of validation bodies, and provides for quality assurance in validation.

In the context of the upskilling pathways policy, validation projects in the field of adult education and employment are piloted. The aim is to develop assessment standards.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Source: Cedefop, 2017b; De Rick, 2016.

CHAPTER 4.

MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1. Baseline 2015

In 2015, in Belgium, key competences were provided mainly by compulsory education (usually from age 6 to 18) including initial VET (ISCED levels 1-3). Key competences (languages, civic education, mathematics) were part of general courses. The learning outcomes expected from these courses were defined by each Community. Within this framework, education providers and teachers in the Flemish Community would also take own measures to more specifically address learners' needs (Bruxelles Formation, 2016).

Key competences had not been explicitly mentioned in the qualifications framework level descriptors, but they included some elements of the key competences defined at EU level in 2006. Centralised assessment by subject (including key competences) was in place in the Community ⁽¹⁶⁾.

In 2015, all three Belgian Communities were conducting major education and training reforms and have announced or taken measures to improve basic skills for all, including VET, where academic performance of learners was poor ⁽¹⁷⁾. In Flanders in particular, VET had for long been held in low esteem and was seen as an alternative for those failing to access or stay in general education, so the number of VET students with major shortcomings in key competences and undiagnosed learning difficulties had been on the increase ⁽¹⁸⁾. More attention to key competences was also being demanded by employers' unions, which were becoming increasingly concerned by the fast evolution of technology and its impact on upcoming competence requirements in languages and ICT (Bruxelles Formation, 2016).

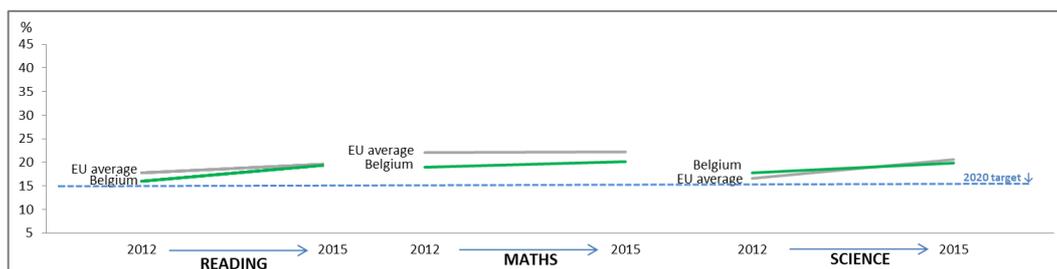
The context of key competences in 2015 was mainly characterised by an increasing share of young low achievers in reading, maths and science compared with 2012 (Figure 1). However, the share of low achievers in Belgium was lower than in the EU on average, where the trend was similar.

⁽¹⁶⁾ <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/curriculum/peilingen/>

⁽¹⁷⁾ European Commission, 2015, p.3.

⁽¹⁸⁾ <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/curriculum/peilingen/>

Figure 1. **Share of 15-year-olds with low achievement in reading, maths and science**



NB: Low achievement means failing level 2 on the PISA (programme for international student assessment) scale. Data for whole Belgium.

Source: OECD, 2014; OECD, 2016.

As VET enrolled 60% of all upper secondary learners in the country ⁽¹⁹⁾, this trend was likely to be reflected in the key competences trained for in VET programmes. These competences were central to compulsory education until age 18, including initial VET.

In 2015, the European Commission and the Council recommended the Flemish Community of Belgium to address skills shortages ⁽²⁰⁾. The recommendation referred to skills for the labour market, including key competences.

Another challenge to be tackled at the time was the evaluation of key competence policies. In 2015, the data on key competence policies were not exhaustive, given the extreme fragmentation of information (Bruxelles Formation, 2016).

4.2. **Key competences addressed in the reporting period**

Table 2 outlines the key competences in initial and continuing VET that were addressed in the reporting period. A description of policies is provided in the following sections.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Calculated from Eurostat table educ_uoe_enrs04; 2015 data.

⁽²⁰⁾ European Commission and Council of the European Union (2015). *EU country-specific recommendations 2015*. https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2015-european-semester-country-specific-recommendations-council-recommendations_en

Table 2. **Key competences addressed in 2015-19**

	IVET	CVET
Country language(s) and literacy	YES	
Foreign languages		
Digital competence	YES	
Maths	YES	
Science		
Technology		
Social and civic competences		
Learning to learn		
Financial literacy		
Entrepreneurship competence		
Cultural awareness and expression		
Key competences as a package	YES	

NB: The list derives from the 2006 EU key competences framework for lifelong learning; it has been restructured and expanded with additional competences that can be considered key.

Source: Cedefop based on ReferNet input

4.3. Key competences in initial VET

The priority of the Flemish Community in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, is the revision of the attainment targets (learning outcomes) for secondary education including VET, in light of 21st century needs in the labour market and society at large.

There was public debate on the attainment targets/learning outcomes for secondary education, including vocational-oriented secondary education (initial VET), between February and June 2016. It involved around 40 000 participants, half of which were young learners. The 2006 EU key-competences framework served as one of the reference documents and delegates provided the Flemish Parliament with their recommendations on improving key competences. The competences referred to included self-knowledge; personal development; social and human skills; self-reliance; knowledge and use of languages; critical thinking and problem solving; knowledge and handling of political and social challenges; skills in ICT, new media, arts and culture; learning-to-learn; and scientific and research competences. Two reports were produced for the Department of

Education, underlining the importance of joint ownership of the curriculum and a shared meaning attributed to it ⁽²¹⁾.

In January 2018 the decree on the renewal of the learning outcomes for compulsory education (for all pupils) was adopted by the Flemish Parliament. The decree stipulates 15 key competences, based on the results of the public debate:

- (a) physical and mental well-being;
- (b) Dutch;
- (c) other languages;
- (d) digital and media literacy;
- (e) social competences;
- (f) civic competences;
- (g) historical awareness;
- (h) spatial awareness;
- (i) sustainable development;
- (j) economic and financial competences;
- (k) judicial competences;
- (l) learning and research competences (critical thinking, problem solving, creativity);
- (m) self-consciousness and self-expression;
- (n) entrepreneurial competences;
- (o) cultural consciousness and expression.

In Dutch, mathematics and digital literacy, each learner will have to achieve 'basic literacy' by the end of the first degree of secondary education ⁽²²⁾. All key competences need to be considered as broad thematic domains, which will be further operationalised in attainment targets. Development committees, comprising representatives of education networks, teachers and academics, have been established. The gradual implementation of the attainment targets was expected to start in September 2019.

In November 2018, several development committees started the development of the attainment targets for the second and third grades of secondary education, though only for those tracks preparing for higher education (ASO and TSO).

⁽²¹⁾ Rouw, R. et al. (2016). United in diversity: a complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders. *OECD Education Working Papers*, No 139. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Simons, M. et al. (2016). *De actuele werking en doeltreffendheid van de eindtermen als beleidsinstrument in Vlaanderen* [The use and effectiveness of attainment goals as a policy instrument in Flanders]. Leuven: KU Leuven.

⁽²²⁾ The aim is that all pupils, when leaving school, have the minimum competences to participate in all spheres of society.

CHAPTER 5.

MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers

5.1. Baseline 2015

Already at the beginning of the reporting period, Belgian VET was highly decentralised, particularly as regards teachers and trainers training. Six main groups of teaching/training staff were at play in upper secondary VET programmes:

- (a) general subjects teachers;
- (b) vocational theory teachers (teaching vocational theoretical subjects);
- (c) vocational teachers of technical or occupational practice courses (e.g. in workshops);
- (d) trainers (teaching general and vocational courses in apprenticeship programmes that were not implemented by schools);
- (e) practical training instructors (accompanying learners during their workplace practical training);
- (f) in-company trainers (nationally referred to as tutors, supervisors/ advisors).

There were also trainers at CVET institutions.

5.1.1. Access to VET school teaching: entry requirements and initial training

There were several qualification options for people wishing to become a VET teacher: a relevant diploma, such as a teacher's diploma for upper secondary education (usually concerning general subjects); a teacher's diploma for lower secondary education (in general, technical or practical occupational subjects); or a secondary or higher level diploma along with an additional higher level diploma in pedagogy. Professionals with another type of diploma (if deemed sufficient) and/or professional experience could also be recruited as IVET teachers.

In the Flemish Community:

- (a) there were two possible initial training pathways to become a VET teacher. The first was a 60-credits teacher training course (*specifieke Lerarenopleiding*, SLO) accessible to holders of a bachelor or master degree also having work experience. The second was a 180-ECTS integrated bachelor course (*Geïntegreerde lerarenopleiding*, GLO), where students would follow courses on two subjects (either general or VET-related, or both);

- (b) trainers without a teaching diploma but working more than 120 hours per year had to undergo at least 120 hours of educational instruction within the first two years of their employment.

5.1.2. In-company trainers: entry requirements and initial training

The tutor position in Belgium had been gradually formalised and recognised, with tutorship training courses throughout the country. In 2013, the federal government gave access to paid educational leave (32 hours maximum per year) for those wishing to follow a tutorship programme.

In the Flemish Community, tutors had to be above 25 years of age, have five years of experience in their field of work, two years of experience as a business leader and attend a 12-hour training course organised by SYNTRA. They also had to prove experience as in-company trainers / supervisors.

5.1.3. Trainers at CVET institutions: entry requirements and initial training

Requirements for CVET trainers were uniform nationwide. They needed one of:

- (a) a bachelor (or master) degree along with professional experience of three to five years;
- (b) a certificate of upper secondary education with five to six years of experience in their occupation;
- (c) professional experience of 10 to 12 years.

On top of this, however, all new CVET trainers in the Flemish Community had to undergo initial training in the field plus basic teacher training. Continuing training for CVET trainers was also in place.

5.1.4. VET school teachers: main lines for CPD

On-site continuing professional development (CPD) training courses (e.g. on technological developments or the use of new equipment) were available in all three Communities. They were financed by sectoral funds and (often) the ESF. VET teachers employed by the public employment service had opportunities for retraining in enterprises (Cedefop, 2015). Training on how to support disadvantaged learners was also offered by VET providers and local associations. Each school, in consultation with its teachers and/or trade union representatives, would set up an annual training programme that could be implemented by a university, a university college, or an association, depending on the budget available.

In the Flemish Community, the government used to set out one or more priority annual themes for teacher CPD. The corresponding courses were accessible free of charge.

5.1.5. In-company trainers: main lines for CPD

Courses, including continuing training for CVET trainers, were available and jointly financed by the Regions/Communities, sectoral funds and (often) the ESF.

5.2. Initial training for teaching/training staff in VET schools 2015-19

For 2016-20, the priorities of the Flemish Community in this area, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, are to:

- (a) attract more and better qualified students to initial teacher education;
- (b) improve the quality of initial teacher education (both for general education and IVET).

On 25 March 2016, the Flemish government adopted a concept note on the reform of initial teacher education. This document sets the framework for the reorganisation of all initial teacher education programmes, including those for VET teachers. Seven working groups were launched, and were assigned the task to develop the concept note further and work towards its implementation. Each group consisted of representatives of teacher education institutions, teacher unions and school organisations. In January 2017, they reported to the minister. A decree on the reform of initial teacher education had been prepared based on the concept note and the reports of the working groups. In autumn 2017, it was commented by stakeholders and negotiated with delegations of trade unions and employers. The decree was adopted on 4 May 2018, with effect from 1 September 2019 ⁽²³⁾. Following the decree, there will be six teacher training programmes:

- (a) bachelor degree in education for teachers in pre-primary education;
- (b) bachelor degree in education for teachers in primary education;
- (c) associate degree in education, a specific two-year programme for teachers in technical and vocational subjects in secondary education;
- (d) bachelor degree in education for teachers in secondary education;
- (e) master of science in teaching for teachers in secondary education;
- (f) master of arts in teaching for teaching arts.

From 2019 onwards, a track for 'side-entrants' will be offered in every teacher training programme. This must be adjusted to the needs of the target group, for example in terms of evening classes, distance learning, and geographic location.

In the wake of the new decree, other initiatives were developed. Since the academic year 2017-18, all students enrolling in initial teacher education at

⁽²³⁾ http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/doc/rech_n.htm

bachelor level have to take an entrance exam on knowledge of Dutch and study motivation. Its objective, however, is not to select students but to manage their skill development. Taking the exam is compulsory, but admission to the programme is not linked to exam results; these are meant to assist identifying any necessary remediation.

A process to review the 'basic competences' for the teaching profession was started in autumn 2017. Basic competences refer to what new teachers should know and be able to do. They are the final competences for which all teacher education programmes in Flanders are supposed to train. The new set of basic competences became valid in September 2019.

5.3. Initial training for trainers in enterprises 2015-19

In the reporting period, SYNTRA Vlaanderen, the Flemish agency for entrepreneurial training, started a training programme for in-company trainers in cooperation with several partners. These partners receive funding for the development of a training programme for in-company trainers, which can be used and implemented in several sectors and/or companies. The programme is aimed to strengthen the quality of apprenticeship systems and the dual learning.

5.4. CPD for teaching/training staff in VET schools 2015-19

The Flemish government sets one or more priority annual themes for teacher CPD. Since September 2014, the implementation of the Decree on pupils with specific learning needs (the so-called *M-decree*) has been a priority. The training courses are free of charge for institutions and teachers.

Another initiative is the development of a professionalisation programme for teacher educators. This is a new programme (20 ECTS) started in spring 2018, focusing on the professional development of teacher educators who have already been working for three to six years. It is jointly organised by all teacher education institutions and partially funded by the Flemish Government.

Statistical overview: 2019 update

Table 3 updates the figures that were provided in Table 1. Although Table 1 may contain data for 2015, these are not systematically repeated here. In some cases, not repeating is due to breaks in time series, which prevent comparability. In other cases, values differ due to methodological changes.

Table 3. **Score on VET indicators in Belgium and in the EU: 2015, last available year and recent change**

Indicator label	2015				Last available year				Recent change			
	BE	f	EU	f	Yr	BE	f	EU	f	Range	BE	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility												
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students	59.6		47.3	ce	'17	57.8		47.8	ce	'15-'17	-1.7	0.5
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET	5.8		28.3	ce	'17	5.9		27.9	ce	'15-'17	0.1	-0.5
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET	21.2		68.1	ce	'17	22.5		68.6	ce	'15-'17	1.3	0.4
Workers participating in CVT courses (%)	53.9		40.8		'15	53.9		40.8				
Workers participating in on-the-job training (%)	39		34		'15	39		34				
Adults in lifelong learning (%)			10.7		'18	8.5	b	11.1		'15-'18		0.4
Enterprises providing training (%)	83.9		72.6		'15	83.9		72.6				
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students	57.8		42	ce	'17	55.9		42.7	ce	'15-'17	-1.9	0.7
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)	41.5		30		'15	41.5		30				
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)			33		'18	42.6	b	33				0
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)			6.9		'18	4.9	b	7.3		'15-'18		0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)			4.3		'18	3.2	b	4.3		'15-'18		0
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)			9.5		'18	12.3	b	10.7		'15-'18		1.2
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)					'16	12.7		11.4				
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)					'16	81.1		79.4				

Indicator label	2015				Last available year				Recent change			
	BE	f	EU	f	Yr	BE	f	EU	f	Range	BE	EU
Skill development and labour market relevance												
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)	1.1		0.5	ce	'16	1.1		0.5	ce	'15-'16	0	0
IVET public expenditure per student (1000 PPS units)			7.1	ce	'16	10.5		7.4	ce	'15-'16		0.3
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost	0.9		0.9		'15	0.9		0.9				
Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	1.2		1	ce	'17	1.2		1	ce	'15-'17		0
STEM graduates from upper secondary IVET (% of total)	20.8		29.2	ce	'17	34.1		29.1	ce	'15-'17	13.2	0
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates					'17	4.2		14.3	b ce	'15-'17		
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)					'16	60.2		37.7	ce			
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds)			77.2		'18	83.1	b	80.5		'15-'18		3.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over general stream)			5.4		'18	10.3	b	6.6		'15-'18		1.2
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)			23.7		'18	28.3	b	23.3		'15-'18		-0.4
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)	77.3		83.7		'15	77.3		83.7				
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	60.6		57		'15	60.6		57				
Overall transitions and labour market trends												
Early leavers from education and training (%)			11		'18	8.6	b	10.6		'15-'18		-0.4
30-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)			38.7		'18	47.6	b	40.7		'15-'18		2
NEET rate for 18-24 year-olds (%)			15.8		'18	11.5	b	13.7		'15-'18		-2.1
Unemployment rate for 20-34 year-olds (%)			12.9		'18	8.7	b	9.4		'15-'18		-3.5
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)			75.9		'18	81.8	b	80.6		'15-'18		4.7
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)			23.5		'18	21.8	b	21.9		'15-'18		-1.6
Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)			70		'18	69.7	b	73.1		'15-'18		3.1
Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)			52.6		'18	45.6	b	56.1		'15-'18		3.5
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2030 (% of total)					'18	90.7	D	85.8	D			

EU refers to EU-28, unless otherwise specified.
(D) Forecast made in 2018.
(ce) Cedefop estimate based on available country data
(b) Eurostat: 'break in time series'.

(u) Eurostat: 'low reliability'.
(z) Eurostat: 'not applicable'.
(e) Eurostat: 'estimated'.
(d) Eurostat: 'definition differs'.

Source: Cedefop, 2020.

In 2017, 57.8% of all upper secondary students in Belgium were enrolled in IVET. This percentage is 10 points above the EU average. It appears, however, that the percentage of upper secondary students in IVET is lower by 1.7 points compared to the situation in the country in 2015.

In 2017, 5.9 % of all upper secondary IVET students were enrolled in a work-based learning setting which is slightly higher (0.1 points more) than in 2015. In contrast the EU average is 27.9%.

In 2018, 8.5% of adults participated in lifelong learning activities. The EU average was 11.1%.

In 2018, the employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 years old) was 83.1%. The EU average was 80.5%.

For the two last indicators, though data were available in 2015 (Table 1), due to a break in time series, 2018 and 2015 cannot be reliably compared.

Conclusion

Since 2015, the Flemish Community of Belgium has taken steps to pilot dual learning with the aim of promoting apprenticeship in IVET. VET programmes of adult education (the so-called HBO5 programmes) are being transformed into short-cycle programmes in higher education. The quality assurance approach for VET (up to level 4 of the Flemish QF/EQF) is being further developed. The Flemish qualifications framework has reached operational stage. Progress was made towards an integrated approach for validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning (EVC, recognition of prior learning). A public debate was held on revising the learning outcomes – including key competences – in secondary general, technical and vocational education. Actions were undertaken on reforming and developing the initial training of VET school teachers and in-company trainers and mentors.

The main changes in 2017 took place in MTDs 2, 4 and 5. In MTD 2, progress was made on graduate tracking towards better linking education and labour market data (Section 2.3). In MTD 4, the decree defining a new list of learning outcomes for compulsory education (for all pupils in secondary education including IVET) was discussed by the Flemish Parliament and was then adopted in 2018 (Section 4.3). In MTD 5, initiatives were taken to improve the initial training of VET school teaching staff (Section 5.2).

Compared to 2015-17, the main changes in 2018 have taken place in MTDs 2 and 5. In MTD 2, a quality assurance framework was developed for VET offered outside formal education but based on professional qualifications linked to the Flemish qualifications framework (Section 2.2). In MTD 5, reform of teacher training programmes was adopted (Section 5.2).

The actions carried out show that the main lines of the Riga conclusions and the Community's policy priorities for 2016-20 are being addressed. However, information available to Cedefop suggests issues which could benefit from further consideration: using the EQAVET indicators to monitor the development of VET; and further supporting key competences in CVET.

Acronyms

AES	adult education survey
CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DBSO	part-time apprenticeship in vocational secondary education
DGVT	Director General for Vocational Education and Training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
Eurostat	statistical office of the European Union
EVC	<i>erkennen van verworven competenties</i> recognition of acquired competences
FQF	Flemish qualifications framework
GDP	gross domestic product
ISCED	international standard classification of education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NEETs	not in education, employment, or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	public employment services
PISA	programme for international student assessment
PPS	purchasing power standards
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
STEM	science, technology, engineering and math programmes
SYNTRA	Flemish agency for entrepreneurial training
UOE	UNESCO OECD Eurostat
VDAB	Flemish public employment and vocational training service
VET	vocational education and training

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