



Ministry of the Flemish Community
Education Department Belgium



**OECD/CERI-STUDY
WHAT WORKS IN INNOVATION IN EDUCATION**

Improving teaching and learning for adults with basic skill needs through formative assessment

**BACKGROUND REPORT
BELGIUM - FLANDERS**

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FOREWORD

In 2005, the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) started with a two-year international study of exemplary teaching and assessment for adults with basic skill needs. The study "Improving teaching and learning for adults with basic skill needs through formative assessment" will address significant gaps in understanding of "what works", for whom and under what circumstances, and will identify policy levers to improve the quality of provision for this population.

Countries were given the opportunity to participate at two levels: participation in the development of a country background report versus full participation involving identification and development of exemplary cases of innovative practice in addition to a country background report.

The Flemish Community of Belgium opted for "full participation", resulting in this background report as well as the elaboration of two innovative cases (see <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172017435434>).

This background report refers to the education for adults with basic skill needs in Belgium-Flanders. Flanders is the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium with approximately 6 million inhabitants. Under the four state reforms between 1970 and 1993, Belgium became a federal state consisting of communities and regions, each with their own specific powers. The competence for education and training lies with the communities, and the Flemish, French and German-speaking communities each have their own educational system. The only educational powers of the federal government concern the ages of compulsory education, the minimum conditions for obtaining qualifications and teachers' pension.

This report only takes into account the Flemish educational system and thus refers to the policies towards adults with basic skill needs that were set by the Ministry of the Flemish Community and to the Flemish provisions for this target group.

As requested, this background report describes the nature and scale of challenges facing Flanders in regard to adult basic skills education, the major Flemish programmes and policies developed to meet the needs of adults with low basic skills, the gaps in provision and take-up, the profiles of instructors, the assessment policies and structures and the "state of the art" in instruction and formative assessment in adult basic skills education.

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1. THE SCALE OF NEED

According to the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) data, roughly one in five Flemish adults has low literacy skills. Of course this group covers a spectrum of need ranging from adults who cannot read or write or perform quantitative functions at all, to people who have problems with one particular literacy component. It is therefore necessary to have a closer look at the group of adults with basic skills needs and identify different levels within “basic skill needs”.

1.1 Adults with low literacy skills according to IALS

Flanders participated in the first cycle of this large-scale, comparative assessment of adult literacy. The data collection took place in 1996 and resulted in the national report “Hoe geletterd/gecijferd is Vlaanderen? Functionele taal- en rekenvaardigheden van Vlamingen in internationaal perspectief” (Van Damme e.a., 1997) [“How literate is Flanders? The functional reading and math skills of Flemish people in an international context”].

IALS defines literacy as “*the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential*”. The skills are measured according to three domains (prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy) and the results are reported on five levels of proficiency¹. Adults performing on the lowest level (level 1) have very poor literacy skills and will have difficulties in coping with the skill demands in everyday life and at work. Therefore level 1 can be used as a benchmark for defining adults with low literacy skills.

The IALS-data showed that all participating countries have a literacy skills deficit (see Appendix 1). In Flanders 18% of adults are not functionally literate (meaning they don’t have the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts) and about the same number of people have problems with numeracy (16.7%). When it comes to locating and using information contained in various formats (also known as document literacy) Flemish adults perform slightly better; the percentage of adults at the lowest level on this domain is about 15%.

Taking all this information into account, 21.9% of Flemish adults perform on the first level of at least one of the IALS literacy domains. This group of persons can be considered as having basic skill needs and thus the target population for adult basic skills education.

IALS not only provides the opportunity to estimate the size of the target group mentioned above; it also looks closely into a set of variables thought to be important features and determinants of literacy proficiency. This makes it possible to describe some major characteristics of low skilled adults and to construct some kind of profile for this group:

- Women tend to be more represented in the group of Flemish adults with low literacy skills ($\pm 60\%$) than men. These women also have a lower level of initial education compared to the average group level².
- Approximately 75% of the low-skilled Flemish adults are 35 or older. This results in an average age for this group that exceeds the average age of the group of adults without basic skill needs (i.e. adults not performing on the first level of any IALS domain) with approximately 10 years.
- Four percent of the Flemish adults performing on the lowest level of at least one of the IALS domains have completed tertiary education. Another 22% completed upper secondary education, but the majority (73%) have not completed upper secondary school.

When looking at the habits of adults it is striking that adults with low literacy skills engage much less in reading (and writing) activities and also report less library visits compared to the average Flemish

¹ See the report “Literacy in the Information age – final report of the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD, 2000)” for an in-dept description of the domains and proficiency levels.

² This trend appears to be changing, as 2005 data show that women had higher initial levels of education than men. The data also show that 29.8% of men and 31.1% of women had higher Education diplomas.

adult population. Around 20% of the Flemish adults performing on the lowest literacy levels reported reading a newspaper or magazine less than once a week. This figure exceeds the percentage of the adults performing on the highest literacy levels by approximately 10%. Only 17% of the adults with low literacy skills report visiting a library sometimes and barely 8% visits a library regularly (at least once a month).

A final set of IALS questions looks at adults' subjective judgements about the adequacy of their own skills. Flemish adults with the lowest literacy levels generally don't rate their literacy skills as either poor or moderate. On the contrary, 82.5% of the Flemish adults performing at level one on the prose scale rate their reading skills as "good" or "excellent". It is only in Denmark and the Czech Republic that adults with low literacy skills tend to overestimate their reading abilities to a greater degree (see Appendix 2 – Figure 2).

A similar response is found for questions regarding whether and to what extent low literacy and numeracy skills limit opportunities at work. In Flanders, only 14,4% of the adults performing on the first level of at least one of the IALS literacy domains thinks his or her reading skills are limited relative to workplace demands. Flemish adults consider difficulties with numeracy to be more limiting. Of Flemish adults performing on the first level of at least one of the IALS scales, 27.7% fear that their mathematics skills will have a negative impact on their job opportunities (see Appendix 2 – Table 2).

In summary, the IALS data show that in Flanders the respondent's education, home language, age and extent of reading at home are the major determinants of literacy proficiency. Those factors together explain 43% of the total variance in literacy proficiency.

The Flemish adults with literacy skills deficits also tend to underestimate their problems and report to encounter very few problems caused by inappropriate skill levels. It is possible they are unaware of their poor skills or, even if aware, they don't regard them as a problem.

1.2 15-year-olds with low literacy skills according to PISA

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses the educational performance of 15-year-old students. The three-yearly survey covers literacy in three cognitive domains (mathematics, reading and science), but within each cycle of the survey the focus is on one assessment area while the other two are regarded as minor domains. In PISA 2000, the focus was on reading literacy, while in 2003 mathematical literacy was the main domain.

The PISA approach to measuring literacy skills is primarily concerned with the extent to which students can apply their knowledge to real world issues. The emphasis is on the mastery of processes, the understanding of concepts and the ability to apply their skills in a variety of situations. Therefore the PISA definitions of literacies are very broad:

Reading literacy is defined as "understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society" and the PISA definition of mathematical literacy is "an individual's capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics plays in the world, to make well-founded judgements and to use and engage with mathematics in ways that meet the needs of that individual's life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen."

As in IALS, the PISA literacy scores are grouped into different proficiency levels. For mathematical literacy, six levels are distinguished, while for reading literacy there are five³. Again the skills of

³ See the reports "Knowledge and Skills for Life – First results from PISA2000 (OECD, 2001) and "Learning for Tomorrow's World – First results from PISA2003 (OECD, 2004)" for an in-dept description of the PISA domains and proficiency levels.

students performing on the lowest levels are considered “barely developed” making this group a high-risk group as regards participation in tertiary education and life-long learning. They also have a bigger chance of ending up in adult basic skills education. For both the mathematics and reading domains of PISA, level 2 is used as an international benchmark: students performing below this level (at level 1 or below) are not considered to possess the baseline skills necessary to cope with the demands of the modern society. In this background report we will therefore consider this group of students as a “high-risk group”.

Taking both the PISA reading and the mathematics literacy domain results into account, 13.9% of the Flemish 15-year-olds perform on or below the first level of at least one of the domains⁴. As mentioned above, this group will be considered “the group of Flemish students at risk of becoming adults with basic skill needs”.

The PISA student questionnaire gathers information helpful to understanding characteristics of the at risk groups mentioned above.

- As compared to the IALS results, where there are more women than men with low literacy levels, a slightly higher percentage of Flemish boys are in the high-risk group (54.4%) than girls. However, this difference isn’t statistically significant. We thus should conclude that at the age of 15 there is no gender difference concerning the number of girls and boys in the group of students with low literacy skills.
- Exactly one third of the Flemish low-skilled students report that their mother did not complete secondary education and 21.5% of them report the same of their father. Moreover, 45% of the students in the at-risk group communicate that their mother was neither employed nor looking for a job at the time of the survey.
- Almost one fourth of the Flemish 15-year-olds in the high-risk group live in a single-parent family. This is almost double compared to the situation in the overall Flemish population.
- Another group that is over-represented in the “at risk group” are the students with an immigrant background, especially those students who don’t speak Dutch or another national language or dialect at home. Overall, first-generation and non-native students together only represent 7% of the Flemish sample. Within the group, as many as 26% of 15-year-olds are at the lowest literacy levels (16.1% first-generation students and 10% students with an immigrant background). Based on these statistics, the percentage of students whose home language is different from the language of assessment or another official language from the country is also much higher in the at risk group (15.8% compared to 3.5% in the overall population).

At age 15, students already have a clear view on their skills and abilities. Students with poorer literacy levels feel less confident in completing everyday tasks than their peers with more developed skills. The difference is greatest for tasks which clearly involve some mathematical computation (for example, solving a simple comparison), but also when more general actions are concerned (such as using a timetable or understanding graphs in a newspaper), as only 50% of the high-risk students feel confident in performing them.

In summary, the PISA data show that in Flanders, the student’s gender, the language spoken at home, the family structure, the occupational status of the parents and the number of books at home are the major determinants of literacy proficiency in 15-year-olds. Together, these factors explain 25% of the total variance in literacy proficiency.

1.3 Unqualified and early school leavers

A basic level of general knowledge is required in order to take part in today’s knowledge-based society and labour market. Persons lacking qualifications are in danger of being left by the wayside in our increasingly competitive society. Students leaving formal education without a degree or

⁴ See the figures in appendix 3 of this report for the international ranking of countries on each PISA-scale.

qualification have only the most basic skills and thus are at higher risk of being unemployed or encountering major literacy deficits in their work, social and personal lives.

There are different ways of defining the group of unqualified and early school leavers (according to the compulsory education criteria, according to the criteria for earning a diploma, according to the type of education that was abandoned, etc.).

The OECD defines “young adults with low levels of education” as including 20 to 24-year-olds “...who have not attained upper secondary education and who are not enrolled in education nor in a work-study programme”(OECD, 2004). In eight OECD countries, fewer than 10% of the population are in this group. Belgium is one of 11 OECD countries where between 10 and 18% of 20 to 24 year-olds are in this group. In Flanders, 13.6% of 20 to 24-year-olds are “unqualified and early school leavers” (see Appendix 4–Figure 4).

Within Europe, however, it’s more common to refer to the population between 18 and 24 years of age when considering early school leavers. Again, unqualified and early school leavers are defined as those persons having achieved education at ISCED⁵ level 2 or less and who are not attending any further education or training. Within the EU, it has been agreed that by 2010 the proportion of early school leavers should not exceed 10% (European average)⁶.

In Flanders, this European definition reflects the percentage of 18 to 24-year-olds whose maximum educational attainment is a certificate of lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and who are not in education or training. According to this European method of analysis, the Flemish percentage of early school leavers was 11.6% in 2000. In comparison with other European countries, this result is rather good – only Austria (10.2% in 2000), Finland (8.9% in 2001) and Sweden (7.7% in 2001) had better figures.

The European objectives also correspond closely with the objectives set in 2001 by the Flemish Government and the social partners in the ‘Vilvoorde Pact’ (See section 2.3.1 of this background report). The second goal of this pact is to “at least half the outflow of unqualified students by 2010”. The previous Flemish Education and Training Minister adopted the mid-term target of reducing the number of early school leavers by 20% by late 2004. However, the recent trend figures show that the Flemish percentage of early school leavers in the group of 18 to 24-year-olds remained around 11 and 12% between 2000 and 2004 (see Appendix 4 – Figure 5).

In 2001, other possible predictors for leaving school without a certificate were reported in a survey by the Higher Institute for Labour Studies (HIVA)⁷. Taking social background characteristics into account, such as parental education, father’s occupation and language spoken at home, the chances of leaving school with qualification are between 54% and 96% (see Appendix 5 – Table 3). These numbers can be improved if, in addition to social background, school level variables are taken into account. The age at which students enter secondary education, the courses students follow during the first year of secondary education, school attendance, and the frequency with which students change

⁵ The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was designed by UNESCO in the early 1970’s to serve ‘as an instrument suitable for assembling, compiling and presenting statistics of education both within individual countries and internationally’. It presents standard concepts, definitions and classifications and covers all organized and sustained learning opportunities for children, youth and adults including those with special needs education, irrespective of the institution or entity providing them or the form in which they are delivered.

⁶ One of the five benchmarks in education and training set in 2003 in follow-up to the Lisbon European Council (2000) was to achieve by 2010 an average percentage of early school leavers of 10% or less. In 2000 the average European percentage was around 19%.

⁷ In 1998 the Flemish Ministry of Education requested a survey to develop an instrument by which they could register the number of “unqualified school leavers”. HIVA (Higher Institute for Labour Studies) conducted the survey which resulted in the report “Ongekwalificeerd: zonder paspoort? Een onderzoek naar de omvang, karakteristieken en aanpak van de ongekwalificeerde uitstroom” (Douterlungne e.a., 2001). [Unqualified: without a passport? A survey on the prevalence, features and approaches towards unqualified school leavers.]

educational programmes, are the best predictors as to which student will leave school early or without a qualification. In general, unqualified school leavers report problematic and negative educational experiences in their school careers.

Although education in Belgium is compulsory until the age of 18, more than 1 in 10 Flemish students leave school with no qualifications. Young adults with low levels of education not only have a greater chance of encountering literacy problems themselves, but there's also a greater risk they'll influence their children's literacy levels. In Flanders, young adults whose mothers didn't complete upper secondary education are 5.5 times more likely to fail in obtaining a certificate of upper secondary education compared to students whose mothers did complete secondary education.

1.4 The impact of low literacy skills

1.4.1 Labour force related outcomes

Literacy skills and labour market related indicators are connected in complex ways. High literacy skills are likely to lead to better employment prospects. At the same time, the workplace plays an important role in literacy acquisition and maintenance: at the workplace a great deal of reading, writing and arithmetic take place.

IALS shows that people who are in the labour force consistently have higher literacy skills than those who are not (OECD, 2000). In Flanders this difference is larger than in most other countries. In 1996, approximately 60% of adults performing at the lowest levels of the IALS document scale were working, had worked or looked for work during the year preceding the IALS data collecting. The labour force participation of adults performing on the higher levels on the document scale was 83.2%. Only in the Netherlands was the difference between those two groups bigger (see Appendix 6 – Figure 6). The incidence of unemployment in Flanders was twice as high among adults with low skills as among adults with medium to high skills. These results were common to results in some neighbouring countries (United Kingdom and Germany), but still the Flemish 17.7% unemployment rate amongst low-skilled adults was the highest in all but two countries (see Appendix 6 – Figure 7).

The 1996 IALS findings are also reinforced by the Flemish employment data gathered by Eurostat (LFS – Labour force survey) and the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). Those data combine labour force data with educational attainment and compare the group of adults with a low level of schooling (ISCED level 2 or below) with those with a high level of schooling. In 1996, 86% of the adults with a degree of tertiary education or higher were in the labour force, as compared to only 44% of the group of 15 to 64-year-olds without upper secondary education qualifications. These figures have barely changed over the years: in 2003 the rates of labour force participation of both groups respectively were 84% and 44% (see Appendix 7 – Figure 8). Flemish adults with a low level of initial education participate less in the labour force and thus have an increased likelihood of being unemployed.

Within this group, there's also a big difference between males and females. According to the labour force data, only one woman in three without a secondary education degree has a job, compared to approximately 55 to 60% of the men. This gender difference diminishes in accordance to the educational attainment level, but it never disappears. Within the group of women with an upper secondary degree but no tertiary degree, the average employment level is 60% as compared to 76.5% for the same group of males. Finally for people with a high level of education (i.e. a tertiary degree or higher) the gender difference is the smallest: 81% of the females with a degree of tertiary education or higher has a paid job, while the percentage of the men in this category is around 90.

Since 1999 the unemployment rate within the group with a degree of tertiary education or higher has fluctuated around 2 - 3% while the unemployment rate in the group of low educated adults was between 6 and 9% (see Appendix 7 – Figure 9). As with IALS results across countries, in Flanders the incidence of unemployment is related to educational attainment: the unemployment rate is more than

double for people without a qualification of secondary education in comparison to people with a qualification of higher education. Again, women with a low level of schooling are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts: while in the period 1999-2003 on average 10% of the women with only an ISCED 2 qualification or below was unemployed, the average for men in this category was around 6%.

Finally, IALS also showed that literacy is not only related to the incidence of unemployment, but also to its duration. In 1996, Flanders belonged to the group of countries where, compared to the overall population, the group of short-term and long-term unemployed were dominated by people with lower literacy levels (see the OECD report “Literacy in the Information age”, 2000). According to November 2004 data (the most recent Flemish unemployment data available), this is still the case (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training VDAB – Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling). In general, 51% of the Flemish unemployed have a low level of education (ISCED level 2 or below). Among those who have been unemployed for less than a year, 43% did not have a secondary education degree. Among those who have been out of a job for two years or more, 63% did not have a secondary degree.

All information concerning labour force related outcomes for individuals with low literacy levels lead to the same conclusion: adults with low skills are less likely to be in employment and are more likely to belong to the group of long-term unemployed.

1.4.2 Educational/learning outcomes

People who engage regularly in cognitive activities such as reading, writing and calculation have more and better opportunities to maintain and enhance literacy skills. As more people with higher levels of education, and thus skills, are part of the workforce, this group has more opportunities to use skills and to engage in informal learning at work (for example, learning to make decisions and how to communicate these decisions to colleagues). In 2000, 72% of the Flemish people in the workforce report learning new things in their jobs⁸. Those already in the workforce also benefit from formal learning opportunities within their job – e.g. between March 1999 and March 2000, about one-third of Flemish employees benefited from company-provided training.

There is also substantial variation in participation in formal and informal learning activities following initial education. IALS showed that, in Flanders, the general participation level in adult education is rather low: in 1996 only 21% of the adults participated in any kind of education or training during the year preceding the interview. The incidence of training varied considerably depending on individual characteristics, including the literacy level of the respondent. In Flanders, fewer than 5% of adults with the lowest literacy skills admitted following some kind of education in the 12 months preceding the IALS-survey. This percentage was the lowest of all participating countries (see Appendix 8 – Figure 10).

The low incidence of training within the group of adults with low levels of basic skills is confirmed by data from the European Labour Force Survey (ELFS). Respondents were asked whether they participated in continuous education and training in the four weeks prior to the survey. Fewer responded positively than did for the IALS survey, but the trends were the same in both surveys. In 2004, only 4% of Flemish adults with the lowest level education responded positively to the participation question. This result was similar to the average participation rate admitted by European adults with an ISCED 2 degree or below. Flanders’ neighbour, the Netherlands, however, reported that more than twice as many adults with a low level of education participated in some kind of training

⁸ Sources are the ESWC (European Survey on Working Conditions) data gathered by the European Foundation in 2000 and adapted by the Flemish Resource Center for Labour Market Research WAV (Steunpunt Werkgelegenheid, arbeid en vorming).

in the four weeks preceding the ELFS (see Appendix 8 – Figure 11). This resulted in a “training gap”⁹ for the Netherlands of 2.3 while in Flanders the gap was 3.4: Flemish adults whose maximum educational attainment is ISCED 2 participated 3.4 times less in continuous education and training than adults with a higher educational degree. Stated differently, Flemish people with an ISCED 2 degree or below are 3.4 times less integrated in the training market than higher educated adults.

In general, lifelong learning in Flanders is a less common activity than in other countries, but the Flemish data also clearly indicate that the adults outside the learning society often are the people most in need of skills enhancement. Low basic skills and a lack of qualifications lower the chance of engagement in either formal or informal teaching or learning: people with the lowest literacy levels receive the least adult education.

1.4.3 Social outcomes

There are substantial non-market benefits accruing to those with higher literacy skills, but it’s not always easy to find tangible data on this topic. For the Flemish situation, the level of education again should be taken as a proxy for literacy levels of adults since there are no data that report on literacy levels.

In Belgium, the scientific Institute of Public Health (IPH) conducts a health interview survey every three years¹⁰. Some of the data gathered provide interesting insights concerning the link between education and health.

First, there is a link between perceived health status and education levels that shows that adults with more schooling report having better health. In 2004, approximately one third of the adults from the group with a maximum of an ISCED 2 qualification reported having a “very bad to fair” health. This figure drops to 13% for the group of adults with a tertiary education degree (ISCED 4 or above). People with higher educational attainment also report healthier habits and life styles and appear to be more informed in regard to management of their own health. For example: there are fewer heavy smokers (20 or more cigarettes per day) within the group of people with more years of education and also fewer women who declare that they didn’t have a cervix smear test in the past three years (see Appendix 9 – Table 4).

The health interview survey not only questions personal health issues; some questions are related to the “social health” of the participants. More specifically, the frequency and perception of social contacts, participation at organised community activities, and the availability of social support (people helping out in an emergency) are surveyed. In summary, those with a lower level of education have less frequent social contacts, lower participation in group activities and a negative perception of the availability and quality of support. This negative perception is consistent in regard to all kinds of support: in 2004, around 10% of the Flemish people with at most a degree of lower secondary education has a negative perception of the social, affective and instrumental (for example, people helping with daily tasks in and around the house) support they receive from their social environment and 7% judged the emotional and recreational support as being rather negative. Within the group of higher educated adults, these percentages were approximately 5% and 2% respectively: only half as many people with a degree of superior education have a negative perception of the support they receive (see Appendix 9 – Table 5). Similar results appear for the participation in organised community activities: in 2004, approximately 50% of the persons with lower levels of education

⁹ The “training gap” is computed by comparing the training participation of people with the lowest level of education (ISCED 2 or below) to the average training participation of the rest of the population. In 2004 this gap for Flanders equaled 3.41 while in the Netherlands it was 2.26.

¹⁰ The sample frame of the health interview survey consists of all households (= the people living at the address of a reference person) in the national register. However, for some questions only people from a certain age are considered. For example, on the questions concerning personal health and social health issued in this report only the population aged 15 or older are included.

participated in any kind of group activity, compared to approximately 75% of those with higher education.

Although the average percentage of Flemish adults who aren't happy about their social health is rather low ($\pm 7\%$), there still is a difference correlated with the educational level of the respondents. People with less education tend to be less integrated in society and participate less in social and cultural activities. Furthermore, they're less satisfied with their social networking than persons who have higher degrees of education.

1.5 Conclusion

Despite all efforts to democratise the educational system and to increase participation in life long learning initiatives, Flanders still faces the problem of a relatively high number of adults with low literacy skills and of young adults at risk of becoming part of this group. Approximately 15-18% of the Flemish adults don't have the literacy skills necessary to participate adequately in modern society.

The Flemish figures concerning early school leavers also indicate the problem is persistent: over the last 5 years, Flemish education has not succeeded in reducing the number of young people leaving secondary school without a qualification. Each year, a similar number of unqualified drop-outs enter the labour market, where they encounter major problems in finding well-paying jobs.

Based on the information on students' home situations in the PISA survey, low literacy levels persist across generations. A high percentage of Flemish students whose parents have low levels of literacy are likely to have literacy problems, as well. In Flanders, young people who don't speak Dutch at home are also more likely to encounter literacy problems. These findings have implications for adult basic education: parents with low levels of literacy can acquire the skills necessary to prepare their children for school and to support them during their education and this way break the cycle of illiteracy.

(Basic) adult education and training can help adults with low literacy skills to overcome their disadvantage and to improve their integration in society. Adult education and training should also help in improving the labour market transition of people and should be able to prevent adults with basic skill needs from ending up in an unfavourable social environment. Put differently, adult education should be an important strategy in the battle against the dualism in our present society - between those who are able to fully participate in the knowledge society and those who cannot.

2. PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES FOR ADULTS WITH BASIC SKILL NEEDS

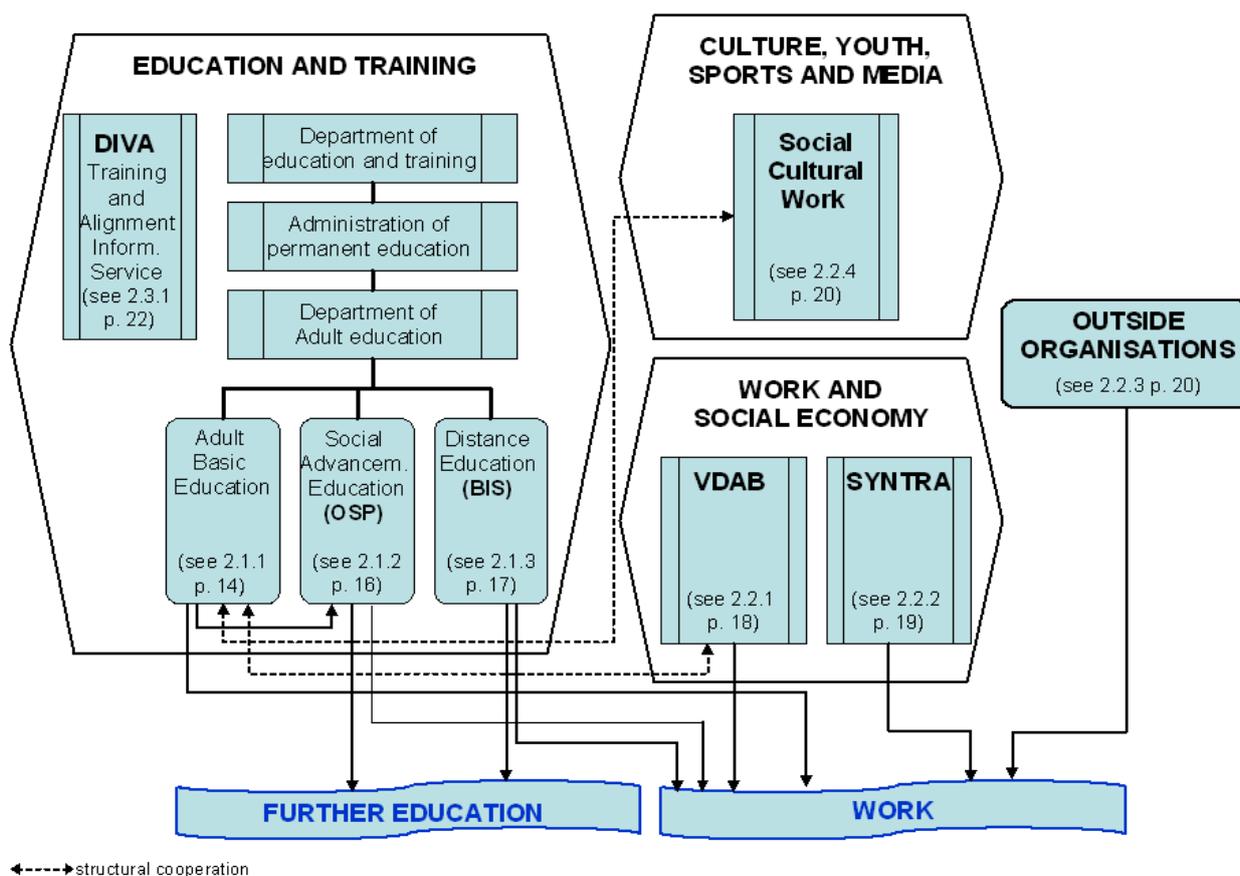
In Flanders, there are several publicly funded education, training and developmental programmes for adults with basic skill needs. The Flemish Department of education and training is responsible for the formal adult education¹¹. Within formal adult education there are three different types of education: adult basic education, social advancement education or continuing education (OSP) and supervised individual study (BIS). All those types of education offer courses to meet the needs of adults with low literacy skills.

Adults with basic skill needs may also participate in vocational training. Vocational training for adults with basic skill needs resorts under the domains of “Education and Training” and “Work and Social Economy”. In the latter domain, for example, the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) and the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship Training (SYNTRA) both offer vocational training targeted to adults with basic skill needs – as do some other private and public servants.

Finally, the sector of non-formal adult education provides adult education outside the state educational system. Their activities comprise a very broad spectrum of cultural, educational, leisure and community-orientated activities intended to enhance personal development and/or social change.

The flowchart below provides an overview of the various Flemish programmes for adults with basic skill needs and the responsible policy domains. Furthermore, the figure shows pathways for further education and employment.

Flemish policy domains and organisations providing courses for adults with basic skill needs



¹¹ Formal education includes all learning and training which takes place in educational institutions and results in official diplomas or certificates. Non-formal education is provided by organisations which are not under the educational policy domain and which don't result in formal certificates.

2.1 Programmes under “formal” adult education

2.1.1 Adult basic education

Since 1990 Flanders has had an official educational programme for semi-skilled and unskilled adults: adult basic education. Before 1990, initiatives targeted to adults with low levels of education were found primarily within the social-cultural agencies and were based on social (and volunteer) work. On September 1st 1985 the Minister of Culture decided to set up an experimental basic education programme for adults on five locations in Flanders for a period of three years. The main intention of the experiment was to investigate how a proper policy could be developed. At the end of the experimental period, basic education was transferred from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Education. This way adult basic education became a professional provision, embedded in the field of adult education.

The decree of July 1990 on basic education defines adult basic education as an educational provision under the authority of the Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community, but it was given its own administrative and organisational model. For example, although adult basic education is part of general adult education, the employees working in the centres for adult basic education don't have the same professional stature as teachers in other educational programmes. Furthermore, people working in centres for adult basic education are not required to have a standard teacher qualification. Anyone with a relevant higher education or university degree (for example in social work) can get a job as an adult basic education teacher, but once they've entered the field they should follow a compulsory professional development course (see section 3.1.1 of this report).

The 1990 decree established a network of 29 independent pluralistic¹² centres for adult basic education in Flanders and formulated a direct funding through a system of “envelope funding”. In other words, the centres receive a grant based on their number of participants: they were funded on the basis of a total amount (envelope) per student hour. In addition to the adult basic education centres, the Flemish Government also funded a Support and Development Agency of adult basic education (VOCB). This support centre functions as a support, guidance and resource institute for adult basic education in Flanders.

Adult basic education especially targets all adults who lack basic knowledge, skills and attitudes to fully participate in society or to follow further training. The decree of 1990 specified the educational boundaries of the target group as “*adults without a secondary school qualification*” (i.e. no certificate of four years of secondary education) or “*immigrants with less than ten years of education in the country of origin*”. This target group description was changed in 2000 and since the amendment of July 15th 2005, officially focuses on the level of competence a person possesses. Adults are allowed to follow courses within adult basic education if they don't possess the key competencies that are being taught within this type of education. This assessment of the level of competence is being discussed in section 4.1 of this report.

The centres for adult basic education are open to adults with a low level of education and provide basic skill courses (Dutch as a mother tongue – NT1, Dutch as a second language – NT2, mathematics, basic social skills - MO, ICT, preparatory courses in French and English and literacy skills for Dutch as a second language – NT2alfa). The curriculum is accessible, functional and determined by student's real-life learning requirements and the courses are free of charge.

¹² Since 1958 there have been two major educational networks within Belgian education: private subsidised education (catholic schools) and public education (community schools). Most regular schools belong to either one of those networks so parents can choose an education that fits their ideological beliefs. In adult basic education however, this distinction doesn't exist. Moreover, the centres for basic adult education acknowledge the diversity of ideological beliefs and interests of their students and permit the peaceful coexistence of those different interests, convictions and lifestyles (pluralistic attitudes).

In September 2003, a modular system was introduced in the centres for adult basic education. Under this system, all domains are subdivided into several successive courses (modules), each with its own level of difficulty and proper final goals. The system also established pathways for learning and progression: before someone can start in a particular module he/she should have required the skills and competencies mentioned in the preceding level. In the 2003-2004 academic year, the programmes for NT2, mathematics and ICT switched to a modular structure. For other programmes (NT1, NT2alfa, MO and preparatory courses for French and English) the switch was completed the 1st of September, 2006.

The modular system is embedded in the decree of May 2004 concerning 'regional technological centres and some urgent educational necessities'. This decree defined the target group and the courses within adult basic education and introduced the certification of courses.

The introduction of the modular system consists of two major steps. First, the government developed a set of "key competencies" and "final goals" for all adult basic education courses. That way the courses are made flexible and transparent and are embedded in the general training structure of the Flemish educational field. The *key competencies* are multifunctional, transferable and are meant to increase the general competency level of adults¹³. In other words, key competencies refer to individual skills which enable people to effectively apply their knowledge in life and to advance to the next modular level. In contrast, the *final goals* are development goals, which list the final attainment level of a course. They belong to one specific domain, sub-domain or module. Depending on the programme, the final goals are subdivided into different substantive domains, which again can be further subdivided into smaller entities. For mathematics programmes for instance, the three "content" domains (numbers, measure and geometry) are divided into various independent goals according to the module. One example of a development goal in the first module of the mathematics programme (basic mathematical competencies) for the content domain on measurement is "students can estimate quantities using bench-marks". Second, the modular system allowed the introduction of certificates and subject certificates: students will receive a subject certificate on finishing a module and a full certificate on completing all the parts of a course.

Both components are intended to help improve the integration of adult basic education with the conventional adult education and facilitate the progress toward further education. The distinctive feature of a modular system is that the final goals mentioned in one module resemble the entrance requirements of a sequel module, no matter where this sequel is organised. Therefore the final goals mentioned in the highest level modules of adult basic education refer to the entrance requirements in the sequel courses offered by other educational institutions.

Although progress is embedded in the modular system, in 2005, an evaluation of the first phase of the modularisation process in adult basic education showed that it remains difficult for adults to progress toward further education (Ministry of the Flemish Community, Onderwijsinspectie, 2005). One possible explanation could be the absence of a general "transfer" policy that covers all educational institutions. However, according to the centres for adult basic education the majority of their students do not demonstrate a desire to move on.

In addition to providing their own courses, the centres for adult basic education also organise courses on request and in collaboration with other organisations such as the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB), companies, local authorities, etc. These courses can range from job application training, to Dutch for the workplace, to more specific programmes such as security training for the Security Certificate.

¹³ In adult basic education the following seven categories of key competencies should be targeted: communicating ideas and information, using numeric data, using information technology, working with others and in a team, decision making, solving problems and improving personal learning and achievement.

Adult basic education is also provided in prisons. The centres for adult basic education are responsible for the coordination of the complete range of educational courses for prisoners, as well as for the delivery of some literacy courses within prisons.

The number of students registering for adult basic education has been increasing every year. In the 2004-05 academic year, about 26 000 adults enrolled in a course. Compared to the enrolment figures in the 1990-91 academic year, this is an increase of around 370 % (see Appendix 10 – Table 6). However, participation is spread unevenly across the available educational courses. Participation in programmes such as “Dutch for native speakers” and “mathematics” account for only 12% of the total enrolment while there are waiting lists for other areas, such as Dutch as a second language and ICT (see Appendix 10 – Figure 12). To counter this non-participation in the typical “literacy” programmes and to increase the overall literacy level in Flanders, the Flemish government developed a Literacy Action Plan and is also working on a new decree that should improve the co-operation between adult basic education and the other adult education providers (see section 2.3.2 of this report).

The Basic Education Decree of July 1990 not only shaped the Flemish adult basic education, it also provided specific policy tools to promote, support and develop this type of education. Originally the administrative supervision and quality control was dedicated to the Flemish support and development centre for adult basic education (VOCB). Since the Amendment of March 2nd 1999 however both assignments have been handled by the Department of Education itself. An administrative unit for adult basic education was set up within the Department of Adult Education and specific regulations for inspections were developed. Since the Inspection Decree of March 31st 1999, the centres for adult basic education have been screened and investigated to determine whether the predefined final attainment levels and development objectives have been effectively achieved. In addition, the Basic Education Decree established a “Council for adult education” to act as an independent advisory body to the Minister of Education. Nowadays those tasks are conducted by the Council of adult education within the Flemish Council for Education (VLOR).

Finally, the decree on adult basic education assures the professionalism of the sector. A team of educational staff is employed at the centres at all times and they are scheduled to participate in further professional training (see Section 3.1.1 of this report).

2.1.2 Continuing education or Social Advancement Education (OSP)

Social advancement education is the largest sector within the Flemish adult education sector. The origins of this type of education can be tracked back to the old “evening schools” and “Sunday schools”, which were established to enable adults to catch on with the education to which they didn’t have access during their initial schooling. The basis of the legislation for continuing education goes back to the general educational legislation of 1957, but in March 1999 a new decree was established which offers a new platform for organising continuing education.

Nowadays, OSP aims to impart knowledge and improve skills and attitudes which are necessary to function in society, participate in further education, practise a profession or master a language. By attending social advancement education, participating adults may obtain a recognised diploma, certificate or qualification. OSP supplements, and is separate from, the initial educational career of the participants and is offered at secondary level and at the level of one-cycle higher education (= ISCED 5B level). The range of courses offered is to a great extent a reflection of what is on offer in full-time education: the structure of continuing education was developed in maximum co-ordination with the regular secondary education based on fields of study, courses, modules and goals. This way, not only is the equivalence of the diplomas guaranteed, but a smooth pathway is established for those wanting to continue.

One subdivision of social advancement education focuses specifically on adults who have not earned a secondary school diploma. This form of education formerly known as “Second chance education” (TKO), but now officially named “**Courses of general formation**”, enables adults to obtain a diploma

that has exactly the same value as certificates given in compulsory full-time education (without having to attend secondary schools geared towards youngsters).

Since the decree of March 1999, the 13 centres providing second chance education have had the authority to grant diplomas and certificates to the students themselves; students no longer have to take part in the examination sessions of the Examination Board of the Flemish Community. The goal of the TKO centres is not only to help students to earn a degree, but also to guide them towards satisfactory integration into society, to increase their chances on the labour market, to remove their feeling of inferiority, and to prepare them to transfer more easily towards continuation courses and studies.

In contrast to most other courses within social advancement education, the courses of general formation comprise full-time daytime education (but participants can also follow courses during 2 or 3 evenings a week). The courses are provided in 13 out of the 122 centres for adult education which are recognised and funded by the authorities. At present they're offered as modular courses.

A prerequisite for admission to the second stage of secondary education is that participants must have a knowledge base at the level of primary education (not a certificate of primary education). At the beginning of their enrolment students are screened thoroughly and referred towards the most optimal starting position. This orientation phase takes up the first two weeks of each semester. In these two weeks students not only participate in the intake exams, but they also have extensive talks with the staff in the centres. During these consultations students get the opportunity to explain their preferences for particular courses, and at the end of the two weeks, an individual "career schedule" is agreed upon. This procedure is intended to ensure that every student is placed in a course and a field of study that meets his or her interests, capacities and expectations.

Although the courses of general formation only represent a very small part of the sector of continuing education, their number of students has been increasing over the years. Compared to the first school year after the decree on continuing education was passed (1999-2000), in the 2004-05 academic year, three times as many adults followed one of the courses of general formation. The enrolment figures rose dramatically from 1 349 in 1999-2000 to 4 099 in 2004-05 (see Appendix 11 – Table 7). The relative increase of number of students within the overall sector of social advancement education over the same period was approximately half this number (1.7 times). Furthermore, according to the data gathered in the centres for adult education over recent years, the average age of the target group of second chance education has changed. The group of 18 to 21-year-old students following second chance education increased, reducing the average age of the student population.

2.1.3 Supervised Individual Study (BIS) or distance education

Distance education provides adults the opportunity to follow education or training based on supervised self-study. BIS education consists of correspondence courses supplemented with the necessary educational materials such as tapes/CD, dictionaries or atlases. Since October 2003 BIS has also been available on the Internet: BIS-online (<http://www.bisonline.be>). A BIS course consists of a number of lesson packets and homework tasks. A mentor corrects tasks and also provides extra explanations whenever needed. All BIS mentors have pedagogical certificates and at least two years of practical teaching experience.

Legislation establishing the distance-education system was initially passed in 1965, but since the decree of March 2nd 1999 distance education was partially integrated into part-time adult education. Supervised Individual Study is intended for adults who want to obtain a certificate or diploma through the examination commissions of the State or Community, who are looking for promotion at work, who would like to change jobs, or who just want to update their knowledge in particular subjects. People completing a BIS-course receive a so-called 'competence-oriented certificate'. This is not a real certificate; it only indicates which particular abilities should have been gained after completing the course.

Supervised Individual Study plays an important role in helping adults with basic skill needs to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to pass examinations for full-time secondary education. BIS is the most popular form of self-study in prison. Most prisoners following a course of adult education follow a BIS-course out of personal interest, but prisoners without a secondary education degree use BIS to prepare themselves for the examinations organised by “the Flemish Community’s Examination Commission”. These examinations enable people to obtain a certificate of the second degree of secondary education as well as a diploma of full-time secondary education outside the regular compulsory schooling system.

Access to this type of education is completely open; there are no special terms imposed in terms of age or certificates required. Normally there is a modest course fee, but prisoners also are granted remission of registration fees. They only have to pay the postal costs for submitting their homework and in exceptional cases for some of the educational materials (e.g. an atlas).

In the last three years the number of adults following a BIS-course stayed constant at around 25 000 participants per year (see Appendix 12 – Table 8). However, only a very small percentage of these participants use BIS to prepare themselves for the examinations of the Flemish Examination Commission. In 2003, fewer than 15% of the participants belonged to the two original target groups of officials preparing for “promotion examinations” and low educated adults preparing for the examination of secondary education.

Where adults with a low level of education are concerned, a possible reason for the decline in their “BIS participation” as compared to previous years could be the growing popularity of the courses of general formation within social advancement education. Choosing courses of general formation implies not having to take extra examinations for the Examination Commission (since the centres providing social advancement education are authorised to grant the secondary school diploma themselves, see 2.1.2 page 16). On the other hand, when opting for BIS to obtain a secondary school diploma, students can’t avoid the examinations organised by “the Flemish Community’s Examination Commission”.

2.2 Programmes not under “formal” adult education

2.2.1 Training provided by the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB)

The Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) is the main provider of vocational training in Flanders. It is a public service controlled by representatives of the employers and the trade-unions (on equal basis) with its primary objective being to offer training courses oriented to the labour market. VDAB’s legal framework originated in the Special Law on Constitutional Reform of August 8th 1980, placing vocational training under the authority of the different Communities in Belgium. Consequently VDAB’s basic competence and functions were specified by several decrees of the Flemish Government (dd. March 20th 1984 and December 21st 1999). The competent authority is the Flemish Ministry of Work and Social Economy.

VDAB organizes training for jobseekers as well as for employers and employees. Training may be offered in the VDAB’s own centres (there are 14 sub-regional employment offices organising short labour market and function-oriented tailor-made courses in more than 70 “competence centres”) or may be offered in collaboration with outside organisations (e.g. on-the-job-training in companies). VDAB provides trainees with a specific certificate. This certificate is not comparable to official diplomas awarded by the educational sector, but they’re nevertheless highly regarded by employers.

VDAB’s vocational training and placement activities also include special efforts for disadvantaged groups and long-term unemployed (~ the “route-counselling” framework). One example is

“Individualised on the Job Training” (IBO – Individuele Beroepsopleiding in de Onderneming) for the unemployed. This programme tries to fill vacancies for which no suitable candidates can be found. Companies employ a jobseeker and give him/her training ‘on the job’. During the training, the company doesn’t have to pay wages, but instead pays a “productivity contribution”. This contribution equals the regular wage minus the average unemployment benefit. Companies receive an extra contribution per hour of training for employing individuals without a secondary education degree.

Another characteristic of the VDAB training offer is the “trajectory approach” (that is, a client oriented approach). Jobseekers in need of a more intensive and personal counselling are assessed, trained (if necessary), placed and followed until they are likely to have a stable job on the labour market. The “trajectory” is defined according to both the demands of the labour market and the trainee’s aspirations and personal skills. In 2005 the VDAB developed 85 647 individual trajectories, of which 61.1% lead to a job (52 312 persons). Almost half of the trajectories mentioned above included adults with a low level of education: 40 005 of the individual trajectories refer to adults having achieved education at ISCED level 2 or below. From this group, 55.3% (or 22 110 persons) found employment after finishing their trajectory.

In 2005 there were 235 344 Flemish unemployed adults looking for a job, of whom 51% had low levels of education (in the possession of an ISCED level 2 degree or below). In 1998, 5 to 15% of jobseekers with low basic skills followed a course offered by the VDAB. Nowadays, between 25 to 45% follow these courses (see Appendix 13 – Table 9 and Figure 14). This increase is the result of federal policy measures which aimed to decrease the number of unemployed people with basic skill needs. For example, the 2000 federal plan (“federaal inschakelingsplan”) aimed to increase the job opportunities of young people with low levels of education. This measure targets young people (25 and under) without a degree of secondary education who have been unemployed for up to 3 months. They are obliged to follow a VDAB-trajectory in order to increase their chances of getting a decent job.

2.2.2 Training provided by the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship – Syntra Flanders

Syntra is Flanders’ main provider of management training for new entrepreneurs in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Syntra’s precursor VIZO (abbreviation for Flemish Institute for Entrepreneurship – Vlaams Instituut voor het Zelfstandig Ondernemen) was created through a decree of January 1991 and thus replaced the Institute for Permanent Training of the Middle Class (IVVM). Since 1996, VIZO has been involved in promoting apprenticeships (Dutch: leertijd), including vocational training for young people 15-16 years of age. The programme establishes an “indenture contract”¹⁴, allowing young learners to acquire the basic skills necessary for employment in a specific industry. In April 2006, VIZO was renamed the “Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship – Syntra Flanders”. It is under the policy domain “Work and Social Economy”¹⁵.

The education and training offered by the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship is provided in 22 regional centres, which currently are merged into 5 Syntra campuses (non-profit organisations with their own legal status). In addition to apprenticeships and entrepreneurial training, they also offer a combination of training activities designed for individuals who are self-employed and senior company managers. Target groups include potential self-employed/entrepreneurs and real entrepreneurs who

¹⁴ The indenture contract is established between a youngster/student and the head of an enterprise. It refers to a specified period in which the head of the enterprise will teach the student a profession. In that time span the student will not only learn the profession, but he or she will also attend some academic courses. This way, the student complies with compulsory education requirements and simultaneously gains practical experience.

¹⁵ To ensure better service to the public, as of 1 January 2006 the Flemish Authorities have undergone major transformations. Under the name Better Administrative Policy (Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid – BBB), the Flemish authorities have been subjected to a root-and-branch reform. In this new policy structure 13 policy domains are distinguished, three of which have a responsibility for training: “Education and training”, “Work and Social Economy” and “Culture”.

have already started a business. Participants receive a certificate of entrepreneur training for the courses they complete. These certificates are validated by the central Syntra office.

Syntra doesn't have a major focus on adults with basic skill needs, but sometimes it promotes initiatives for this target group. For example, Syntra promoted the "alternative pathway towards entrepreneurship" project, which targeted young people without secondary education degrees, or with special secondary education degrees, who applied for an apprenticeship. In this project the students received an adapted version of the modular course "Basic social training" given in the first year of the apprenticeship (~ small groups, a methodology based on card-indices to better target the personal needs of the students, a supervision instrument for the teachers and a constant supervision by a team of professionals). After this course the supervision team decided whether it was useful for the student to proceed to the regular system of apprenticeship or not.

In the 2004-05 academic year, approximately 28 000 persons participated in entrepreneur training offered by Syntra, and around 5 300 people participated in an apprenticeship. While it's very hard to estimate the percentage of participants with basic skill needs, it is certainly a very small proportion.

2.2.3 Training provided by "outside organisations"

Private and non-profit organisations also provide training and employment services. In most cases these organisations are in the social development sector (i.e. social services, such as welfare, community services, and so on) where there is deep knowledge of the target group. These training and employment initiatives use their own approaches to teaching, and aim to provide complete support of their clients: "on the job training and route counselling" (trajectory approaches), as well as social skills training and more specialized, technical trainings.

In Flanders, there is no separate legislation covering the training provided by the private and non-profit sectors. The outside organisations do receive project funding (e.g. money from the European Social Funds - ESF), as well as specific government-supported subsidies to finance (part of) their work. They also co-operate extensively with The Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) and with other formal and non-formal organisations.

Since a lot of training organized by the private and non-profit sectors is subsidized by ESF-funding, many of its statistics are recorded in the VDAB tracking system¹⁶. According to figures for 2002, 9 618 jobseekers followed a training organised by an outside organisation (which was recorded in the VDAB client registering system). Nearly 70% of those training courses offered by private and non-profit organisations (6 673 participants) represent on-the-job training and route counselling. Not taking into account the persons with a foreign degree, almost 60% of the jobseekers following training were low-skilled or, put differently, didn't have a degree of lower secondary education (see Appendix 14 – Tables 10 and 11).

2.2.4 Training provided by non-formal adult education ("socio-cultural education")

In Flanders, non-formal education (i.e. not leading to any formal qualification or certification) is primarily referred to as "socio-cultural work". Activities for adults include a broad range of cultural, leisure, educational and community-oriented activities intended to enhance personal development, social change or both with an emphasis on increasing well-being of individuals and groups in modern society. It thus forms part of the concept of continuing education.

The socio-cultural activities are provided by associations, regional "folk high schools", movements and specialised institutions (including special target groups and adult education within trade-unions). The sector of non-formal education also has its own support and development centre, Socius.

¹⁶ Registering in the VDAB-system for student guidance is a necessity to receive ESF-funding, so all training (co-) financed by ESF-money can be retrieved there.

Since the 1970s, the field of socio-cultural education has been professionalised, thanks to the government grants policy. In April 2003, the Flemish Parliament adopted a new decree regarding the recognition and government funding of the organisations providing non-formal adult education. The new legislation stipulates the eligibility criteria for the recognition and support for about 100 socio-cultural organisations. It also states that the subsidies will be given on the basis of quantity of activities rather than their quality. Furthermore the government policy subsidises extra cultural infrastructure and programmes, in particular services offered by public libraries and cultural centres. In general, the government has made a wide variety of facilities available including an administrative structure, adequate grants, infrastructure, materials and equipment and facilities for professional back-up.

Because the well-being of individuals and groups in society is one of the major pillars of socio-cultural education, some initiatives focus on adults with basic skill needs. However, they're just one of the many target groups within socio-cultural education. Due to a lack of quantitative data within the sector, it is impossible to say how many adults with low literacy skills they reach with their regular programmes.

In 2005, social-cultural education and adult basic education initiated the project "Adult basic education and social-cultural education for adults". This project wants to stimulate adults with basic skill needs to move-on to non-formal education. At present this project is still being piloted in four Flemish regions and its results will be used to develop a step-by-step plan that every adult basic education and social-cultural education centre can use to stimulate their students' flow.

2.3 Flemish policies/initiatives developed to meet the needs of adults with low literacy skills

2.3.1 Established legislation and initiatives

Since 1990, the most important Flemish policy initiative to meet the needs of adults with low basic skills has been the decree on adult basic education. This decree not only brought together most of the dispersed initiatives for adults with basic skill needs into one autonomous sector. It also placed the new sector under the authority of the Ministry of Education and thus enhanced professionalism, and professional status of those working in the sector.

In 2000 the Flemish Government decided to evaluate the working of the adult basic education sector and initiated an evaluation survey. This survey not only revealed internal bottlenecks (for example the need for a better definition of the target group, the huge diversity of approaches within the sector and the absence of a system of internal quality control and an evaluation culture), but it also pointed out some important structural problems. First, the evaluation survey discussed the dilemma of the autonomy of the sector of basic education versus its further integration in other formal (adult) education. Second, the lack of (structural) co-operation between adult basic education and other kinds of adult education on the one hand, and workplace related organisations on the other, was striking. Both those problems have since been taken into account in the newly developed Flemish legislation regarding adults with basic skill needs.

In 2001, the Flemish government together with a representative sample of civil society organisations, trade-unions, employers and environmental organisations reached an agreement on 21 objectives for the 21st century, to be reached by 2010. These objectives constitute the "**Vilvoorde Pact**" which can be described as the foundation of a new social contract of the 21st century in line with the Lisbon targets of the EU. Two objectives refer to the concept of lifelong learning, one of which explicitly focuses on the overall literacy rate: "*In 2010 the number of functionally literate people and the number of people with ICT competencies will have risen to more than three quarters of the population. By 2010 the number of young people, who leave school without sufficient basic qualification for the labour market will at least be halved and education will be more democratic. Dualism in society will*

be combated by guaranteeing that everyone will have access to learning initiatives and by promoting equal opportunity throughout the entire learning process.”

Since reducing the low literacy level is one of the targets of the Flemish policy on lifelong learning, in 2003 the Flemish Government elaborated a green paper on objectives (doelstellingennota) for a “Strategic literacy plan” (Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid). This paper briefly outlines the Flemish literacy situation and lists 10 key objectives formulated in line with the objectives mentioned in the Vilvoorde Pact (see Appendix 15). On June 24th 2005 the Flemish Government approved the “**Literacy Plan**”, which includes 35 actions to assure the key objectives are met. Some actions are already being implemented (for example the establishment of a literacy screening instrument for job seekers), but most actions are to be implemented between 2005-2011.

One of the Flemish initiatives that derives from the government’s attention towards lifelong learning is **DIVA - Training and Alignment Information Service**. As described earlier in this chapter Flanders provides diverse training and adult education opportunities. In view of the fragmentation of the political responsibilities and the large number of parties involved at the operational level, there was a need for a strong structure to achieve an integrated policy at the intersection of education, work and training. From March 2003, the coordination tasks at central and local level were situated in DIVA and from 2005 a new policy structure was drawn up for the coordination of the education and training policy (cf. footnote 13 of this report). In this new policy structure, three levels were established, each referring to one level of the policy cycle:

- At the level of *policy decisions* a Ministerial Committee on Education and Training was established;
- At the level of *policy making*, an interdepartmental steering group was installed, consisting of representatives of the administrations of the three policy domains. Within the department of Education and Training a new unit was defined, the Project Strategic Education and Training Policy;
- DIVA oversees *implementation of policy*, ensuring the alignment tasks at operational level. More specifically, DIVA serves a platform for the public training providers. The result of this should be that infrastructure and funds are used profitably and collaboratively. A concrete product of DIVA is the “wordwatjewil” database, a comprehensive database of the training offer in the Flemish Community that has been operational since 2005 and is connected to the Ploteus portal site.

This integrated education and training policy has two major objectives, both of which will have an impact on adult basic education:

1. Stimulating lifelong and life wide learning, beginning in compulsory education, and continuing throughout the life-span. The policy comprises all forms of learning, formal and informal, general, as well as vocational education.
2. Strengthening the connection between education and training on the one hand and the labour market on the other. It encompasses all education and training matters in the policy areas of “Education and Training”, “Work and Social Economy” and “Culture” (such as: the alignment of changing demands of competencies in the professional world and education and training provision; opportunities for relevant work experience; the valorisation of competencies; the esteem of the vocational education; the internal alignment of the education and training for greater efficiency and a greater labour market mobility).

2.3.2 Future plans

By 2008 the Flemish government will have developed a **new decree on adult education**, but its intentions are already stipulated in a draft paper (“conceptnota nieuw decreet op het volwassenenonderwijs”).

The four most important objectives related to adults with basic skill needs are:

- First, the new law on adult education emphasises the synergy between all adult education providers: it not only stimulates co-operation between the different organisations, it also imposes this if necessary.
- Second, the decree supports expansion within the sector: the centres for adult education and the centres for basic education should fuse into 14 regional cooperatives. These centres will all receive the same basic funding for their personnel as well as “envelope funding”, based upon the number of hours of courses. Each centre will also receive the necessary pedagogical support needed for their individual approach towards their learners. However, within this coalition, adult basic education will still maintain its own independence.
- Third, the innovations imposed by the latest revisions of the previous decree (for example the introduction of the modular system and minimal targets, the certification system and the recognition of acquired competencies) will be continued.
- Finally, the new decree emphasises the role adult education has in regard to the provision of (basic) literacy skills. It even claims the primary function of adult education is to provide second chance education.

2.4 Gaps in provision

Since 1990 the sector of adult basic education has been the main provider of education for adults with low literacy skills in Flanders. However, in addition to this specialised type of education several other Flemish organisations also offer training and/or education for this target group. Despite the range of courses developed over the last 15 years, several problems concerning the provision of education for adults with basic skill needs have become apparent. The new policies try to target problems as well as they can, but some gaps still remain.

One of the major gaps within the adult basic skills sector has always been the **lack of co-operation** between the different training providers and the lack of pathways for further education and training. In 2000 the evaluation survey, “10 Years of Adult Basic Education in Flanders” revealed that within this sector there has been some resistance from the centres towards courses targeting the promotion of students from adult basic education courses to regular adult education or to vocational training initiatives. It also wasn’t easy to develop this pathway from basic skills to regular education since there were neither standardised goals nor key competencies for the various courses.

Since the introduction of the modular system in adult basic education in 2002, standardised goals and key competencies for the various courses have been developed. The various (individual) pathways within the modular structure also stimulate the flexibility of the offer, so the centres for adult basic education have made a lot of progress in addressing the deficiency mentioned above. Furthermore the other organisations providing education and/or training now have a stronger focus on the target group of low-skilled adults. After all, recent legislation stresses the importance of literacy (in society, in the work force, in education, etc.) and focuses on networking between all parties involved in the education and training of people with basic skill needs.

At present, there are some nice examples of structural co-operation (i.e. embedded in the activities of the various partners), but when the actions mentioned in the Flemish literacy plan will be implemented (e.g. promoting a survey on the necessities for networking, developing indicators for networking and stimulating structural co-operation) the deficit really will have been addressed. It should then be much easier to extend the personal pathway for a student who has started in one particular organisation to take courses or work in another. Once this system is put into place tailored guidance should be self-evident.

Another major problem concerns the prevalence of some **“hard to reach” target groups**. For example, persons with learning disabilities or difficulties, or with mental disabilities often don’t find courses in adult (basic) education that fit their needs. Nor do people with multiple disadvantages (e.g. single mothers with low levels of education) easily find their way to literacy courses.

The Flemish literacy plan includes outreach to target groups which currently rarely participate in adult basic education. For example: mothers with low literacy skills and participants in associations fighting poverty now are considered two priority target groups for adult basic education. Initiatives targeting these two groups are being developed and organisations working with people in these target groups are being consulted. Good practices will be communicated to the general public and the insights and lessons learned during a pilot phase will be integrated into an action plan against poverty. Similarly, the government will implement a survey to investigate ways in which the needs of people with all types of learning difficulties may be addressed. The survey will be used to adjust the educational pathways within adult basic education and other training providers to meet the needs of adults with learning difficulties.

Finally, the **number of participants in the typical “literacy” courses** given in adult basic education has been **stagnating** over the last few years. The centres for adult basic education themselves admit they encounter major difficulties in reaching native Flemish adults with basic skill needs for their language (NT1 – Dutch as a mother tongue) and mathematics courses, despite all their efforts, (e.g. enrolment campaigns, extra support in attracting students for the Dutch for native speakers courses). According to the adult education inspection report, this problem occurs because of the definition of literacy used in the centres for adult basic education. Instead of switching to the IALS definition of literacy and its different literacy levels, the centres often refer to the literacy definition used in welfare organisations (literacy as a problem of a certain group of people who are not able to read and write properly). Since the centres didn’t succeed in circulating an adequate and modern view on literacy, their offer might not look appealing to a large group of potential students. To tackle this problem, literacy training should be incorporated in other training offers for people with low literacy levels and dual tracks should be stimulated (combining literacy and vocational training). Both these recommendations are mentioned in the key objectives of the Flemish strategic literacy plan.

In summary one could say that the recently developed Flemish policies and actions targeting Flemish adults with low literacy levels will also address the major problems that have been identified in the provision of basic education. If (and to what degree) they will succeed will only be apparent over the next few years, but they definitely established the literacy debate as an important issue in education and in other sectors.

3. PROFILES OF INSTRUCTORS

Since adult basic education is the most important area of the Flemish field of education for adults with basic skill needs, this type of education is considered most extensively in the next chapter. Within adult basic education, all teaching practices and measures for increasing the professionalism of provision focus on adults with low levels of literacy.

The other training providers are only considered when it's possible to give clear descriptions of their general instructional practices for the target group, which haven't already been mentioned in the previous chapter.

3.1 Profiles of instructors

3.1.1 Teachers' qualification and professionalism

The 1999 decree on **adult basic education** placed an emphasis on the professionalism of the sector. A team of permanent educational staff should be employed at all times in each centre. The task of the staff is focused on teaching, student guidance and counselling. Furthermore it was laid down by decree that educational staff in the centres for adult basic education must be given professional development. Since 1995 this compulsory professional development, which is organised as advanced teacher training, is provided in two higher education colleges in Antwerp ("Karel de Grote High School" and the "Autonomous High School"). The training is spread out over two school years and uses a modular system. It focuses on teachers in adult basic education, but the training can also be followed by anyone wanting to work with low-skilled adults – the only educational requirement is a degree of higher education. The object of this further training is to reinforce, expand or update the professional skills of the participants in relation to the target group of adults with basic skill needs. Overall the training takes 1 500 hours, is divided into contact modules, and includes assisted practical training and personal study.

The **courses on general formation** reside under the authority of the formal adult education (thus under the Flemish Ministry of Education) and therefore similar professional demands apply to teachers in these programmes. In Flanders, teachers must possess a recognised teacher qualification¹⁷. Depending on the type and level of education a teacher will be working in, the required qualifications differ.

Generally, in Flanders there are four major initial training routes for teachers and they all lead to qualifications suitable to teach in adult education (and in courses on general formation):

- *Specialised teacher training programmes offered by universities, colleges of higher education and continuing adult education colleges – subdivided in 3 routes :*
 1. **Teacher training programmes following on academic education (after obtaining a master's degree):** this teacher education is taken after an initial academic education and involves a one-year training (60 credits points). This training isn't integrated in the regular bachelor/master structure of the Flemish academic education, but is considered as a separate training programme within universities leading to a specialised teaching diploma (i.e. a teacher certificate).
 2. **Teacher training programmes following on professional education (after obtaining a professional bachelor's degree):** this teacher education is taken after a professional education in the same colleges of higher education where the professional bachelor degree was taken. It involves one year of training (60 credits points).

¹⁷ There is one exception to this obligation: schools can recruit people without a recognised teacher qualification, because of their "relevant (work) experience". However, those "teachers" aren't be included in the official teacher's statute, will never have a permanent appointment as a teacher and will earn less than their colleagues with the qualification.

3. **Teacher training programmes following on academic education or professional career (for people with work experience and/or an academic degree):** these part-time courses offered by the continuing adult education colleges (CVO) involve both general pedagogy and teaching experience in schools and are awarded with the qualification “Certificate of Education” (GPB)¹⁸. They’re mainly followed by individuals with work experience (wanting to convert their experience in a teacher qualification) or by individuals without a higher education degree for whom the teacher training courses offered by universities and/or colleges of higher education are out of their reach.
- *Professional teacher training bachelor degrees offered by colleges of higher education (teacher training departments).* These teacher training programmes involve pedagogy for the age range being studied and subject work. The colleges of higher education offer a range of programmes covering nursery, primary and lower secondary teaching, but some colleges also offer vocational and upper secondary teacher training. In general, these professional teaching bachelor degrees involve three years of training and 180 credit points.

Although the vocational training courses don’t belong to the formal education system, training is conducted by certified teachers. These trainers might not have a special qualification referring to the teaching of adults with basic skill needs, but they do have the qualification or competencies needed to conduct training.

In general there is no separate Flemish path awarding diplomas for teaching in adult basic education, but every professional frequently working with adults with basic skill needs must follow the advanced teacher training focussing on this target group. This professional development (or advanced teacher training) has been compulsory for educational staff at the adult basic education centres since 1995.

In addition, the project “Train the trainers” focuses on the training of adult education teachers working with adults in very diverse training settings.

In addition, there’s also the DIVA-project “Train the trainers” focusing on the training of adult education teachers. This programme doesn’t lead to a teacher qualification, but individuals following this training will be exempt from several subjects taught in the specialised teacher training programme mentioned above.

3.1.2 Opportunities for training and professional development

In contrast to primary and secondary schools, the Flemish centres of adult education and adult basic education are not obliged to develop a policy for professional development¹⁹. However, since they are not under the 1996 decree on teacher training, they don’t receive funding for professional development. Within the adult education centres this sometimes leads to awkward situations since the centres have to pay for the courses themselves. The inspectorate report on professional development in adult education shows that in general there is no structural professional development system within the adult education centres. The decision to follow a course or training programme is left to individual teachers.

Within **adult basic education** the situation is somewhat different since the Support and Development Agency of adult basic education (VOCB – Vlaams OndersteuningsCentrum voor Basiseducatie) is responsible for providing support and guidance to the adult basic education centres. This might be additional training for the educational staff, as well as training to assist the centres with innovation and

¹⁸ Beginning in September 1st 2007 this education offered by the continuing adult education colleges is referred to as “specialised teacher training”.

¹⁹ In 1996 the Flemish government adopted a decree on teacher training and in-service training which places a greater emphasis on the initial monitoring and professional development of the teacher in his career. The new requirements imposed on teachers are integrated in the job profiles and basic competencies. However, the requirements of this decree apply only to primary and secondary education.

further developments of the sector. For example, with the introduction of the modular system, VOCB provides extra training opportunities concerning the screening and evaluation of students. Furthermore the VOCB provides training and support targeted to specific needs of the centres. Despite the presence of these professional development opportunities, the inspectorate report shows that even within adult basic education the level of professional development varies considerably amongst the centres.

The future policy plans are to establish one Flemish support centre for all adult education. This new support centre will replace and expand VOCB's support and guidance function: it will guide the centres for adult education on system level and it will coordinate professional development for management and staff. The support centre will guarantee permanent support services for the sector of adult education, but it will also have the flexibility to provide targeted support and training for the centres of adult education. Furthermore, the support centre will coordinate the development of modular trajectories across organisations and will provide expertise on e-learning for the Flemish adult education sector.

In addition to the professional development opportunities offered within the formal adult education there are of course many other organisations providing opportunities for training and professional development (e.g. university-based initiatives, training offered by private organisations, training offered by the educational networks, and so on.). However, most of the time, these programmes don't focus explicitly on the target group of adults with basic skill needs, nor on the specific needs of people working within adult basic education.

3.2 General features of the education

In Flanders, **adult basic education** is designed to meet the specific learning needs of adults with basic skills. Furthermore adult basic education serves as a stepping stone toward other training and/or educational initiatives.

Since adult basic education has been more strongly embedded within the formal adult education structure, the organisation of courses has changed a lot. At present basic education works with a set of "development goals" which are closely linked to the three outcomes of basic education (that is, educational, professional and social). Each modular training course within basic education is described in terms of competencies –including skills, knowledge and attitudes. Each training course also contains several modules at different levels, each with its own specific goals, as described in point 2.1.1 on page 15.

Overall, the basic courses are oriented towards social independence, while the higher-level courses focus more on the progression toward other education or work-related initiatives. Courses taught in adult basic education typically are at primary education level (or are situated at the level of the first stage of secondary education) and are linked with the subjects taught in other formal adult education programmes. Students can choose their own learning path across the courses offered and can receive a certificate once they have completed certain courses (or a subject certificate on completion of a module).

In recent years, adult basic education adapted a more structured approach (~ the modular system, "key competencies", certificates and screening). For the people working in the sector this switch implied a change in mentality: instead of planning the learning activities using goals they've agreed upon with the students, they now have to plan their learning activities using goals/targets defined by the government. Some instructors feared they would endanger the flexibility they have had to target the individual needs of their students due to this change, but this shouldn't be the case. The new, structured approach indeed focuses on learning programmes with standardised goals but, if necessary, there still is enough room to offer programmes adapted to the needs of specific target groups. Centres, for example, can cluster goals from different programmes and create a "made to measure" package for a particular target group.

In general, within adult basic education students have always been (and still are) guided into courses adapted to their learning objectives and needs.

Some typical features of adult basic education include:

- *Tailored courses*: the focus is on the individual student who enters a module that fits his/her educational capacities. Individual guidance is essential to adult basic education. Whenever possible adult basic education instructors adapt their materials to each student's goals, and work one-to-one with students in need of individual support.
- *Professional approach*: the courses are supervised by a team of professional staff members who use a variety of methods. Most of the materials used have been developed by the centres themselves over the years, but sometimes the instructors also adapt (translated) materials from other countries or adapt primary/secondary education materials to fit their needs. Furthermore, students participate actively in the learning process. On a regular basis, they reflect on their learning processes and progress with the instructor and, if necessary, the learning process is adapted (at present these talks are rather informal and aren't recorded systematically in all centres, but the recently developed student guidance instruments should facilitate the establishment of a formal process – see sections 4 and 5).
- *Pleasure in learning*: since many basic education students have a history of school failure and negative learning experiences, it is important to re-establish a certain "pleasure in learning". This might be developed through attention and respect for each student (on the part of instructors and all school staff), practical lessons providing quick results, and by enthusiastic teachers. These themes are covered in the advanced teacher training focussing on adults with basic skill needs.
- *Practical organisation*: at present the 29 centres for basic education are spread throughout Flanders and Brussels. Once the new decree on adult education is adopted, these centres will be combined with the centres for adult education into 14 regional centres. Courses are organised to suit different schedules – for example, more versus less intensive courses, organised during the day or in the evening, etc. – and students may join classes at different points in the year.
- *Networking*: in order to realise its targets adult basic education co-operates with many different organisations. At present there already is structural cooperation with the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB), with socio-cultural organisations and welfare organisations.

The "tailored approach" is also embedded in the individual student guidance and the possibility of "Open learning"²⁰. Adults not making progress in their learning process can switch to specific programmes designed at least to maintain the competence level they've already attained. For these students, an individual plan is elaborated, listing specific targets the student and his teacher decide upon together. This plan can be started at any point in an educational pathway, and allows the student to continue his/her modular course after completion of this extra programme.

In general the educational approach and methods used within Social Advancement Education (OSP) resemble those used in regular secondary education. The structures used within the **courses of general formation** (previously second chance education) however don't reflect mainstream features. In adult second chance education the courses are organised more flexibly. They anticipate the individual situation and learning needs of each student and hold the student partly responsible for his/her learning process (for example students have to organise their own study plan and activities and they can decide for themselves to slow down or accelerate the learning trajectory depending on their needs).

The modular courses are organised for groups of students, but in most cases, at the beginning of the learning trajectory each student has an appointed personal guide. This person helps the students to

²⁰ Sometimes part of a centre for adult basic education is transformed into a learning institution "open to the public". During opening hours adult basic education students or other persons with particular learning needs can enter the centre and use the educational resources (including computers). In these open learning centers, students can work at their own speed and they can also find extra material to practice what they've learnt in adult basic education courses. There is always someone from the staff present to help and support those in need.

delineate their individual educational pathway. Students following courses of general formation are free to select subjects they want from the package of modules offered. At the end of each semester the students can obtain a subject certificate for each module completed.

In contrast to the courses offered in adult basic education and second chance education described above, many of adult education activities are non-standard. In socio-cultural work with adults, for example, the training institutes play an important role in adult learning. As providers of non-formal education, they are able to promote lifelong learning, and bring it closer to the people. Participating in fairly low threshold training in groups might prompt the participation in other learning activities.

3.3 “State of the art” in instruction in adult basic education

Although the **centres for adult basic education** don't systematically question the satisfaction of their students (though at the end of a course most teachers do informally check whether the course has met the students' expectations) there are several indications that participants are satisfied.

The 2000 evaluation survey on Flemish adult basic education showed that almost nine out of ten participants (88.9%) were very satisfied with their programmes²¹. The participants were especially satisfied with the methodical approach (the pace of the courses, the use of everyday language, personal assistance, etc.) and the teachers' attitudes (in particular the respect and attention given to each participant). The reported weaknesses included the intensity of the courses, the very few pathways between adult basic education courses, and group composition (people with different abilities and from very different social groups having to attend the same course). In general, students in the Dutch as a second language (NT2) were found to be less satisfied than the other student groups.

The evaluation survey results are confirmed by the findings in the surveys on students' satisfaction the centres for adult basic education perform themselves. For example, each school year the centre for adult basic education in Meetjesland systematically checks how its students perceive the content of the courses they follow, the educational approaches, student guidance, etc. The results of the 2004-2005 survey revealed that 65% of the participants rated the teaching they have had at adult basic education “very good” and another 34% rated “good”. Ninety-seven per cent of the participants said the teachers' explanations were clear, and 93% indicated that teachers clarified issues when necessary. In contrast, only 71% of the participants considered the educational standards to be adapted to their abilities. In particular 48% of the students as a second language courses (NT2) judged the standards poorly adapted to their capabilities. The negative ratings given by students in these courses may be caused by the intensity of the courses (up to 12 hours a week with many development goals to be covered) in combination with the difficulty people with basic skill needs have in evaluating their own abilities.

It is expected that results would be similar if the survey were repeated in the other centres for adult basic education. Furthermore the inspectorate report on the centres for adult basic education confirms the prevalence of the “typical features” of adult basic education²². The inspectorate report describes the centres for adult basic education as having an “open” learning environment (i.e. open to everyone

²¹ As part of the evaluation survey 208 (ex-) students were questioned about their experiences with adult basic education. Although the focus of the interviews was exploring the effects of adult basic education on the abilities of participants, some questions also checked the satisfaction with adult basic education participation. Students were asked to rate their overall satisfaction (on a 5-point scale ranging from “absolutely not” to “very satisfied”) and were invited to list some strengths and weaknesses of adult basic education.

²² Since the Inspection Decree of March 31st 1999, the external quality control on the centres for adult basic education is handled by the Department of Education, authorising adult education inspectors to assess their overall quality (see section 4.2 of this report). Between 2001 and 2004 all 29 centres have been screened, resulting in one summarising report for the sector. (Ministry of the Flemish Community, Onderwijsinspectie, 2005)

who wants to learn something) and a customer-friendly attitude. The inspectorate report also claims that the relaxed atmosphere and interaction between students and instructors creates a pleasant learning environment. Instructors, the report notes, always attempt to select appropriate didactical approaches.

4. ASSESSMENT POLICIES AND STRUCTURES

As mentioned in chapter 2.3.1 of this background report, the 2000 evaluation survey “10 Years of Adult Basic Education” revealed that there was neither an evaluation culture nor a system of internal quality control within the sector. Adult learners also received little formal affirmation of their learning achievement; certificates of participation did exist, but these had little formal value. Nowadays the modular structure with development objectives and the certification system allows more systematic assessment and screening.

This section describes both the assessments on student-level (used in the programmes for adult with basic skill needs and in particular in adult basic education) and the external quality control of these programmes.

4.1 Student-level assessment practices

Since September 2004, admission criteria for **adult basic education** have changed from the students’ level of schooling to the level of his or her competences. In the past, the screening instruments used to assess the level of competence of adults varied across centres (most centres developed their own placement tests) and across the different domains (for the “Dutch as a second language” courses (NT2) for example the COVAAR test – a test for cognitive abilities- was and still is commonly used). Since 2004, three general assessment instruments have been developed especially for adult basic skill students²³ – an ICT-intake test, a mathematics placement test and a standardised intake procedure. These instruments include easy hands-on exercises. Students also attempt to resolve a set of questions during the intake procedure. The answers to the questions provide an idea of the students’ attitudes, motivations and capacities. Furthermore, the assessment instruments provide necessary guidelines for the person conducting the assessment. These guidelines also help to determine which course each adult should take – taking into account the student’s learning goals and motivations.

The standardised intake procedure described above also facilitates the guidance of students in general: it distinguishes 10 different phases within the student guidance process (such as registration, intake, placement, etc.) and discusses what should happen and who is responsible for each phase. Some centres for adult basic education already used the procedure as stepping stone for generating their own system of permanent evaluation (see section 5.2).

The centres for adult basic education are free to choose how they assess whether their students have reached the developmental objectives established by the government. However, the centres’ assessment policy must be mentioned in their “evaluation code” which should be approved by their board. A formal test or examination is only one of the many modes of assessment the centres can apply. For example, evaluation spread out over the duration of a course/module allows assessment of the students’ progress throughout his learning process, and facilitates adaptation of the process and remediation if necessary. Since this assessment mode also reduces the risk of failure and student stress, most centres for adult basic education do use permanent (formative) assessment in combination with a final test at the end of the course.

In the school year 2003-2004 the modular courses for “Dutch as a second language” (NT2), mathematics and ICT in adult basic education were implemented. In the 2004-05 academic year, the adult education inspection agency conducted a first survey on the results and problems accompanying this switch. The 2005 evaluation report on the modularisation shows that many basic education students participate in the tests organised (for each course) by the centres. For example, 75.4% of the students in the “Dutch as a second language” (NT2) courses and 79% of students in ICT courses took

²³ In 2004 the Academic Institute for Teacher Training of the University of Leuven finished a project called “Development of an Assessment Strategy for the centres for basic adult education” (Peeters, 2004). This resulted in two assessment instruments for the domains ICT and mathematics and a third one for the intake procedure.

part in those assessments (Inspectorate Adult Education – report June 20th 2005). Respectively 81.5% and 83% of the participating students also passed.

Since adult education is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the basis of the sector's assessment and external control strategies is laid down by decree (and is similar for all formal adult education providers). As is the case for the centres of adult basic education, the providers of **courses of general formation** are required to mention their assessment policy in their “evaluation code” (see section 5.2). One policy requirement concerning assessment states that there must be at least one summative assessment at the end of each module or at the end of each school year (for linear courses) so students can receive credits for each course completed.

As mentioned in the second chapter of this report, students are screened at the beginning of their enrolment in second chance education. This screening takes place during a two-week intake period in which the language and mathematics skills are thoroughly tested.

At present, an experiment within the vocational training courses provided by the **Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency** (VDAB) involving a literacy screening instrument for jobseekers has just ended. During this project people working in the VDAB competence centres learned how to use a tool which identifies individuals with low levels of literacy. This tool is intended to be used during the intake conversations. Once a person with basic skill needs is identified he/she should be referred to adult basic education services. This experiment thus not only provides the VDAB with a literacy screening instrument, it is also intended to stimulate cooperation between this sector and adult basic education. Furthermore, the project is intended to help meet the goals of the second key objective of the Flemish Strategic Literacy Plan. This tool can help adults with basic skill needs recognise their literacy needs and guide them towards programmes that may help address them.

Despite the promising features of the experiment, the first evaluation report shows some disappointing results. First, only 80 persons were identified having low levels of literacy instead of the approximately 1 000 individuals expected based on the Flemish IALS data²⁴. Second, of the 80 people identified only 15 were referred to the centres for basic adult education and finally only 6 enrolled in a literacy programme.

4.2 External quality control of programmes

Since the Inspection Decree of 31 March 1999, the external quality control of the centres for **adult basic education** has been handled by the Department of Education, authorising adult education inspectors to evaluate overall quality of the centres. The inspection instrument used is based on the CIPO framework (Context-Input-Process-Output) and uses indicators, variables and descriptions which were given a scientific underpinning and which are relevant for the sector of adult education²⁵.

In 1999 the decision was made to inspect all adult basic education centres over a three-year period – allowing a fast and general introduction of quality control. Since then, centres for adult basic education have been screened and investigated to determine whether the predefined final attainment levels and developmental objectives have been achieved effectively, and whether centres have properly complied with other statutory obligations. The inspectorate reports, which are made available

²⁴ The experiment was conducted in two towns where approximately 6 000 people had an intake interview at VDAB during the testing period (December 2004 – July 2005). This implies that during the experiment 1.33% of the VDAB clients were identified as having low literacy skills. This identification rate is a major contrast to the IALS findings saying approximately 18% of the Flemish population having basic skill needs.

²⁵ The outlines of the 1999 decree on adult education served as the starting point for the development of the indicators and variables used in the adult education inspection document. This way the quality control refers to the policy makers' objectives.

to the general public after their publication, provide a basis for the evaluation and monitoring of the sector.

By 2004 all centres for adult basic education had been inspected once, resulting in a first inspection report on the sector (Ministry of the Flemish Community, Onderwijsinspectie, 2005). Regarding assessment in the centres for adult basic education, the inspectorate report concludes that in recent years, the centres have optimised their assessment procedures, have been developing instruments and are beginning to communicate assessment results to the students more systematically. Therefore the report doesn't make any special recommendations for policy concerning assessment practices in the centres for adult basic education.

The external quality control on the **courses of general formation** is also handled by adult education inspectors conducting audits in the centres for adult education. As mentioned above, the inspection instrument used for the quality assessment in centres for adult education is an adapted version of the CIPO framework. In the 2000-01 academic year, adult education inspection started with the systematic screening of the centres for adult education (CVO's) and if everything goes as planned, all centres will be inspected over a 6-year period.

The 2002-03 inspection report summarised the findings of the first 48 centre inspections. This report showed that most adult education centres (92%) satisfy the policy requirements on assessment (i.e. they have an official "evaluation code" and they systematically keep track of assessment results). However, when looking at this more closely, the inspection discovered there's a huge difference in the assessment practices among centres and among the teachers within a centre. For example, in 42% of the centres of adult education, teachers adapt their assessment instruments to the objectives of a course, while in the other centres assessment practices are rather traditional (i.e. focused on giving marks)²⁶. The inspectorate report concludes the centres of adult education are becoming more aware of the importance of solid assessment policies: in the follow-up visits they conduct one year after each inspection, they noticed all adult education centres followed the "assessment recommendations" they received after the first visit and were moving toward diversified assessment strategies.

²⁶ The percentages mentioned refer to the centres of adult education (CVO's) as a whole. The courses of general formation are only provided in 13 out of the 122 centres for adult education, so the results might differ if only those centres providing courses of general formation are considered.

5. FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

In Flanders, there is no formal government policy on formative assessment in adult basic skills education. Moreover, there is no formal government policy on formative assessment. Policy documents do mention requirements for assessment, but they're referred to as "evaluation" requirements, and they never indicate which type of assessment/evaluation education providers should use.

This section discusses the terms used in Flanders to describe evaluation/formative assessment/etc. and then gives a state of the art in formative assessment within the education for adults with basic skill needs.

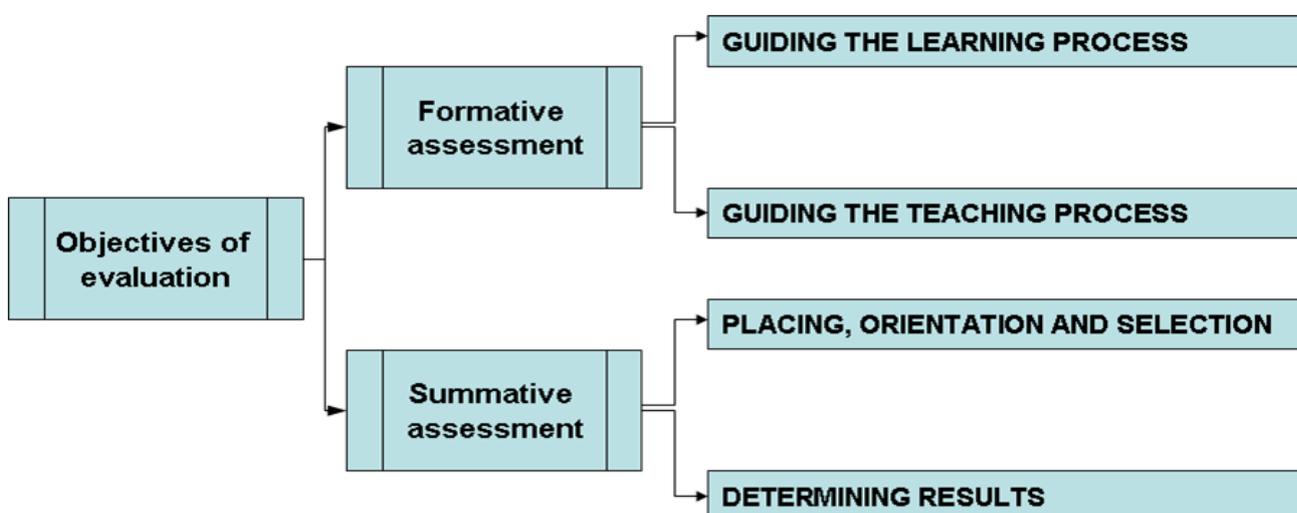
5.1 Definitions of evaluation and assessment

As in adult education, the introduction of final goals and developmental goals established by the government in general education (primary and secondary education) had a major influence on assessment practices. In the past, educational targets in general education were limited mainly to the cognitive domain and within this domain the emphasis was on knowledge and insights. Today the educational targets are much wider and involve knowledge as well as attitudes and skills (cfr. the final goals and key competencies in adult basic education). This change moved the Flemish educational field from a system based on summative assessment (= *making a value judgement on the students' performance after a specific time period*) towards a system combining the traditional summative approach with formative assessment strategies (= *permanent assessing students' progress during their learning process*) (Ministry of Education, Onderwijsinspectie). Stated differently, education moved towards an "assessment culture" where the emphasis is on the integration of instruction and assessment/ evaluation (Van Petegem, 2002). The concept "assessment culture" reflects the broader assessment system nowadays used in Flemish education.

In Flanders the term evaluation ("evaluatie") traditionally is used for both the assessment of individual performances and the evaluation of programmes or systems. In policy documents "evaluation" is defined as "an instrument to look at the student's learning progress and return".

Within an "assessment culture" evaluation serves different objectives:

Objectives of evaluation within an "assessment culture" (Van Petegem, 2002)



In order to meet the different evaluation objectives, education should use different types of assessment strategies and instruments. Therefore, in the last few years “alternative” assessment methods (such as peer- and self-assessment, co-assessment – i.e. the participation of the students with the staff in the assessment process-, portfolio’s, log (books), etc. – have found their way into the teaching practice in Flemish education.

5.2 “State of the art” in (formative) assessment in the education for adults with basic skill needs

The 1999 Adult Education Decree states only two requirements concerning assessment/evaluation²⁷:

- *the centres must have an assessment policy that is clearly described in their “evaluation code”* (art. 38). This code is handed over to the student during his/her intake and mentions, among other things, the examination methods, the timeframe in which the examinations should be taken, the composition of the examination board, the deliberation methods and the way the examination results will be communicated.
- *the centres should at least organise one examination at the end of each school year or at the completion of a module* (art. 39). The policy documents don’t mention any requirements regarding the type or content of the final testing; they expect them to meet the goals established by the government.

The centres for adult education are thus free to choose how they will assess their students, but at the same time, they also have the responsibility on the quality of their assessment instruments.

The same situation applies for the centres for adult basic education: they also are to mention their assessment policy in their “evaluation code” (which should be approved by their board) and should at a minimum organise one assessment per module. Furthermore, they are to keep a written reflection of their assessments over three years – so it can be used during inspection visits and for verification purposes. Apart from these requirements, the centres are also free to apply the assessment instruments and methods they prefer.

The quality of the assessment of both adult education provisions is screened by the adult education inspectorate (see previous chapter), which lists several specific demands (requirements) and expectations (things the centres are advised to do - more permissive than the demands) concerning assessment and assessment instruments:

DEMANDS:

- assessment should focus on whether students have reached the targets set by the government;
- students should be familiar with the assessment policy (~ all features are described in the centre’s “evaluation code”);
- the centres are required to save copies of the assessments;
- assessment should be criterion-based rather than focused on norms (where the criterion refer to the targets set by the government);
- if necessary, the centres clearly define the judgment criteria (distribution of marks, weighting, etc.)

EXPECTATIONS:

- to increase the reliability of their assessment policy, centres should use a variety of assessment methods;
- centres should adapt the assessment to the nature of the courses – vocational courses for example will need a different kind of evaluation than theoretical courses;

²⁷ As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Flanders the term “evaluation” is also used for the assessment of individuals. Everywhere the word “evaluation” is used in this section this is exactly what is meant – the Flemish policy and inspection instruments always use “evaluation” instead of “assessment”.

- good assessment goes together with high-quality feedback and remediation of the teaching process. Therefore it's better to perform assessments regularly – checking the student's progress and, if necessary, adapting the teaching process;
- the returns on education will be improved if students are actively involved in the assessment process. Peer-assessment, self-assessment and co-assessment offer possibilities to stimulate students' participation;
- the tests used have correction keys which are clear and easy to handle;
- there should be no bias in the assessments (assessments should measure what they say they measure and should be structured, clear and unambiguous);
- to avoid transfer problems, the assessment assignments are functional, authentic and relevant to the course taught;
- team deliberations and assessment by colleagues (Dutch: "intervisie"²⁸) will have a positive impact on the quality of the assessments.

Some of the demands and expectations mentioned by the adult education inspectorate refer to the use of formative assessment strategies, although this term is never mentioned in their documents. This ambiguity also shows in the centres: adult education teachers have been using teaching methods and approaches to assessment that resemble the key elements of formative assessment, without calling them formative assessment. Furthermore the most recent inspectorate reports indicate that both centres for adult basic education and centres for adult education are implementing a broader range of assessment strategies, including formative assessment (see section 4.2).

At present, in **adult basic education** several centres use a system of "student guidance" in which they keep track of each student's progress and problems during the different phases of his/her learning process. The student guidance documents offer a framework which facilitates permanent follow-up and thus stimulates "permanent evaluation"²⁹. Students receive guidance from the moment they first enter the centre until the moment they stop taking courses. For each phase (intake, placement, while following courses, etc.) the student guidance instruments mention (per type of course offered) what should happen and who is responsible. Furthermore, they indicate which materials are available or should be used and whether and how the data should be saved. Some centres for adult basic education have developed their own student guidance scenario, but since 2004, centres have been able to follow defined pathways on student guidance as part of the standardised intake procedure for the sector (Peeters, 2004 – section 4.1 of this report).

Some of the student guidance documents used in adult basic education also include "permanent evaluation schemes" or "progress schemes". These schemes break down modules and courses into various small goals or goals for development, and it's up to the teacher to indicate which goals each student has mastered and to what extent. Afterwards, data registered in the schemes are used to complete the student's summary assessment card-index (i.e. a file listing the student's presence, his/her achieved attitudes and key competencies and the teacher's advice on continuing training versus repeating the module). Teachers not only have to complete the documents, they also have to communicate the assessment results with their students. This feedback is a very important part of the permanent evaluation system, and should be used to improve the instructor's teaching and the student's learning process.

The assessment strategies used in the **centres for adult education** are very diverse among centres and teachers. However, as described in the inspectorate report, more centres are integrating permanent [or

²⁸ "Intervisie" = small working groups comprised of people who do or do not work together, to explore both organisational and personal matters. The focus of "intervisie" is for the team to pose open, reflective questions to the problem-bringer. "Intervisie" enables individuals to get collegial advice on organisational and personal matters.

²⁹ In Flanders "permanent evaluation" and formative assessment refer to the same assessment method: *frequently and interactively evaluating students' progress to optimise and adjust the learning and teaching process*. Both terms thus put the emphasis on feedback opportunities and are considered as synonyms.

ongoing] assessment into their courses. At present, some adult education centres providing courses of general formation are switching from formal evaluation system with tests and examinations to a system based on formative (permanent) assessment only.

During a professional development workshop for people working in adult education (“Language education for adults: get going for a broader assessment practice” – April 28th, 2006), participants were asked whether and how they make ongoing assessments. The answers showed that teachers in adult education vary a great deal in the extent to which they assess students (ranging from teachers giving only a final test or examination at the end of a course or module, to teachers using permanent assessment to the exclusion of summative assessment). For those using permanent assessment, there was also great diversity in instruments used.

They include:

- (verbal) feedback sessions on the observed performance during the lesson (given during or after the lesson);
- (language) portfolios prepared and kept up to date by the students;
- peer-assessment during a co-operative learning process;
- group discussions and group assignments (most of the time used to evaluate how the student speak publicly);
- self-assessment by students;
- observation sheets.

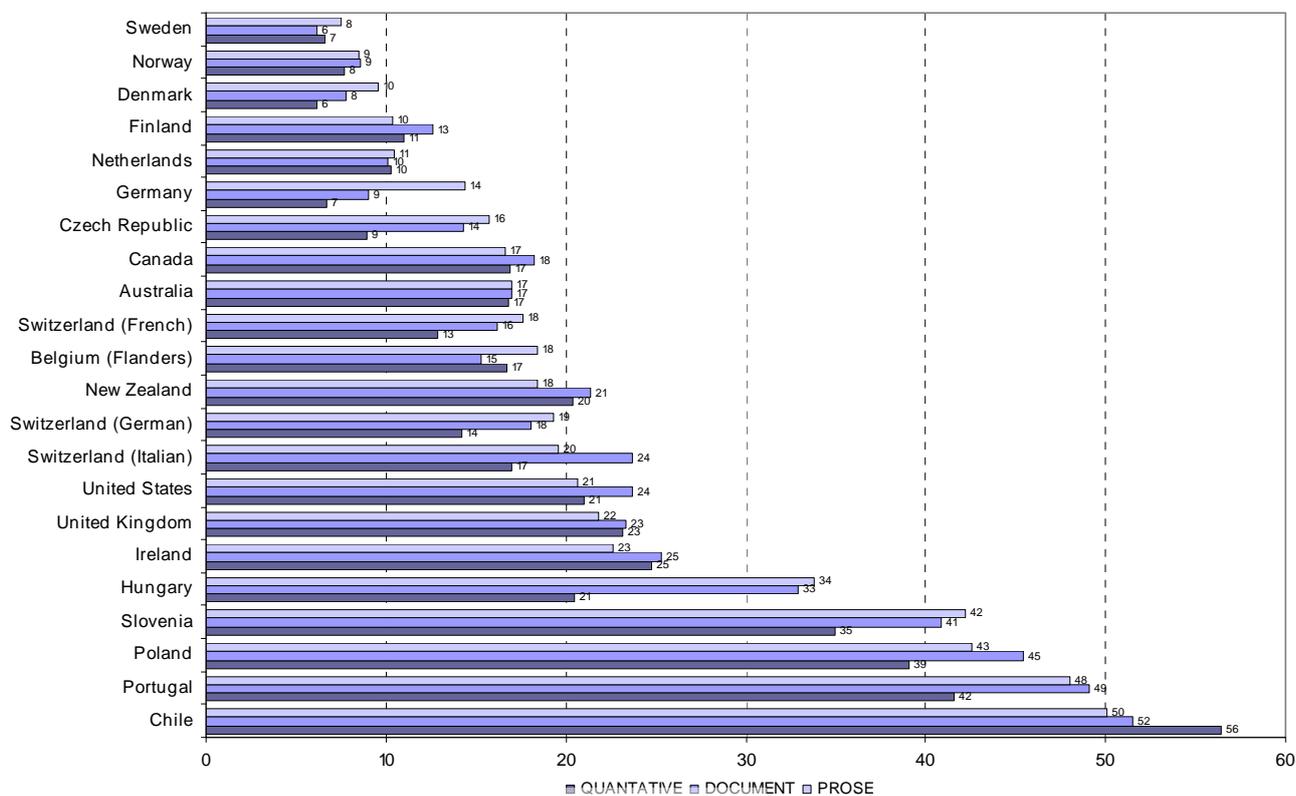
In summary we could say that while there is no formal Flemish policy on formative assessment, these assessment practices have found their way into adult education. However, the degree to which formative assessments are used varies a lot between centres, types of courses, teachers, etc. making it very difficult to give an overall picture on formative assessment in Flemish adult education.

APPENDIX 1 - Comparative distribution of literacy level (IALS data)

Table 1: Percentage of adults at each prose, document and quantitative literacy level (IALS, 1994-1998)

	PROSE				DOCUMENT				QUANTATIVE			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Chile	50.1	35	13.3	1.6	51.5	35.4	11.7	1.5	56.4	26.6	14.3	2.6
Portugal	48	29	18.5	4.4	49.1	31	16.6	3.2	41.6	30.2	23	5.2
Poland	42.6	34.5	19.8	3.1	45.4	30.7	18	5.8	39.1	30.1	23.9	6.8
Slovenia	42.2	34.5	20.1	3.2	40.9	31.8	22	5.3	35	30.4	26	8.6
Hungary	33.8	42.7	20.8	2.6	32.9	34.2	25	8	20.5	31.6	31.7	16.1
Ireland	22.6	29.8	34.1	13.5	25.3	31.7	31.5	11.5	24.8	28.3	30.7	16.2
United Kingdom	21.8	30.3	31.3	16.6	23.3	27.1	30.5	19.1	23.2	27.8	30.4	18.6
United States	20.7	25.9	32.4	21.1	23.7	25.9	31.4	19	21	25.3	31.3	22.5
Switzerland (Italian)	19.6	34.7	37.5	8.3	23.7	30.7	38.3	13.6	17	28.1	37.9	17
Switzerland (German)	19.3	35.7	36.1	8.9	18.1	29.1	36.6	16.1	14.2	26.2	40.7	19
New Zealand	18.4	27.3	35	19.2	21.4	29.2	31.9	17.6	20.4	28.9	33.4	17.2
Belgium (Flanders)	18.4	28.2	39	14.3	15.3	24.2	43.2	17.2	16.7	23	37.8	22.5
Switzerland (French)	17.6	33.7	38.6	10	16.2	28.8	38.9	16	12.9	24.5	42.2	20.4
Australia	17	27.1	36.9	18.9	17	27.8	37.7	17.4	16.8	26.5	37.7	19.1
Canada	16.6	25.6	35.1	22.7	18.2	24.7	32.1	25.1	16.9	26.1	34.8	22.2
Czech Republic	15.7	38.1	37.8	8.4	14.3	28	38.1	19.6	8.9	22.3	37	31.9
Germany	14.4	34.2	38	13.4	9	32.7	39.5	18.9	6.7	26.6	43.2	23.5
Netherlands	10.5	30.1	44.1	15.3	10.1	25.7	44.2	20	10.3	25.5	44.3	19.9
Finland	10.4	26.3	40.9	22.4	12.6	24.1	38.1	25.1	11	27.2	42.1	19.7
Denmark	9.6	36.4	47.5	6.5	7.8	24.2	42.6	25.4	6.2	21.5	43.9	28.4
Norway	8.5	24.7	49.2	17.6	8.6	21	40.9	29.4	7.7	22	42.9	27.4
Sweden	7.5	20.3	39.7	32.4	6.2	18.9	39.4	35.5	6.6	18.6	39	35.8

Figure 1: Percentage of adults with literacy skills at the lowest level of each IALS domain



Source: OECD (2000), Literacy in the information age - Table 2.2

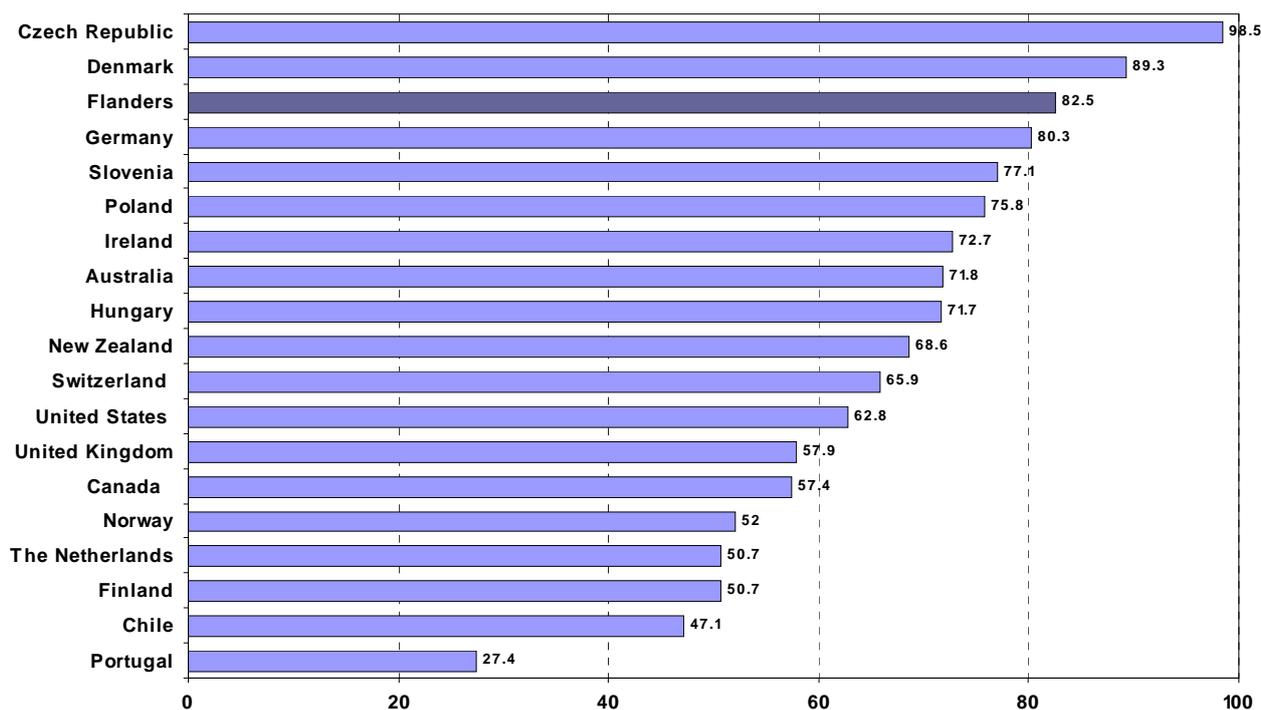
APPENDIX 2 – Individual awareness of poor basic skills (IALS data)

Table 2: Percentage of adults performing on the first level of at least one of the IALS literacy domains who report that their reading or mathematics skills limit their opportunities at work (IALS, 1994-1998)

	Reading skills	Maths skills
Flanders	14.4	27.7
Poland	12.6	19.8
Switzerland (French)	23.4	28.3
The Netherlands	18.1	18.0
Switzerland (German)	17.3	15.6
United States	39.3	30.6
Canada	42.4	38.6
Germany	59.4	44.4

Source: Van Damme, D., e.a. (1997), Hoe geletterd/gecijferd is Vlaanderen? - Table 12

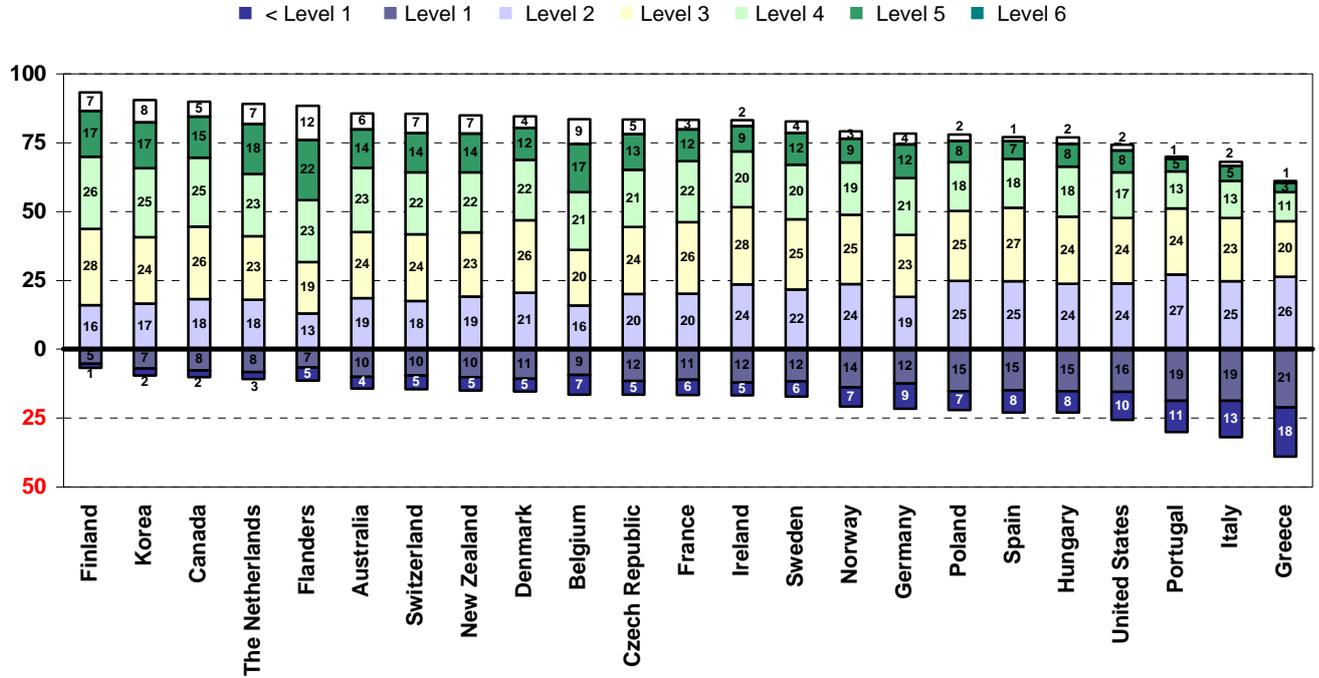
Figure 2: Percentage of adults performing at the first level of the IALS prose scale who rate their reading skills either good or excellent (IALS, 1994-1998)



Source: OECD (2000), Literacy in the information age - Table 3.19

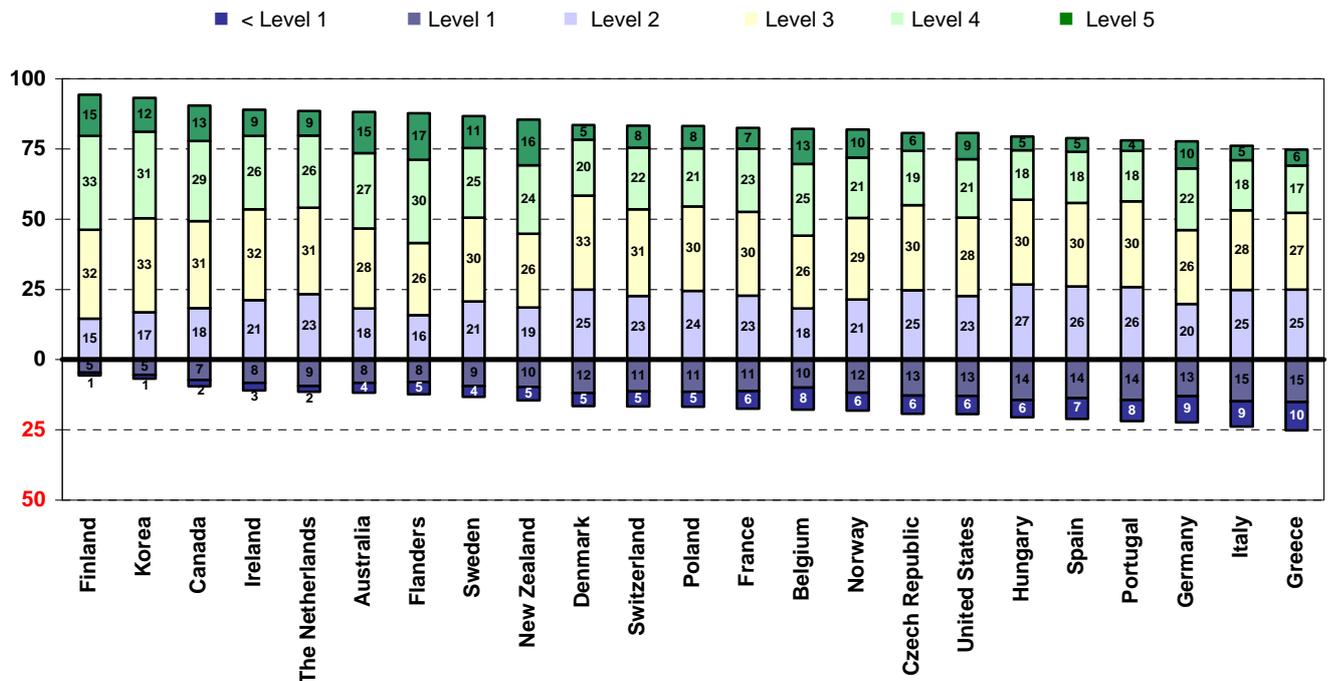
APPENDIX 3 – Percentage of students at each level of proficiency on the mathematics and reading scale (PISA2003 data)

Figure 3: Percentage of 15-year-olds performing at each level of proficiency on the PISA maths scale



Note: due to rounding off, the sum of the percentages not always equals 100
 Source: OECD (2004), Learning for tomorrow's World – Figure 2.16a and Table 2.5a

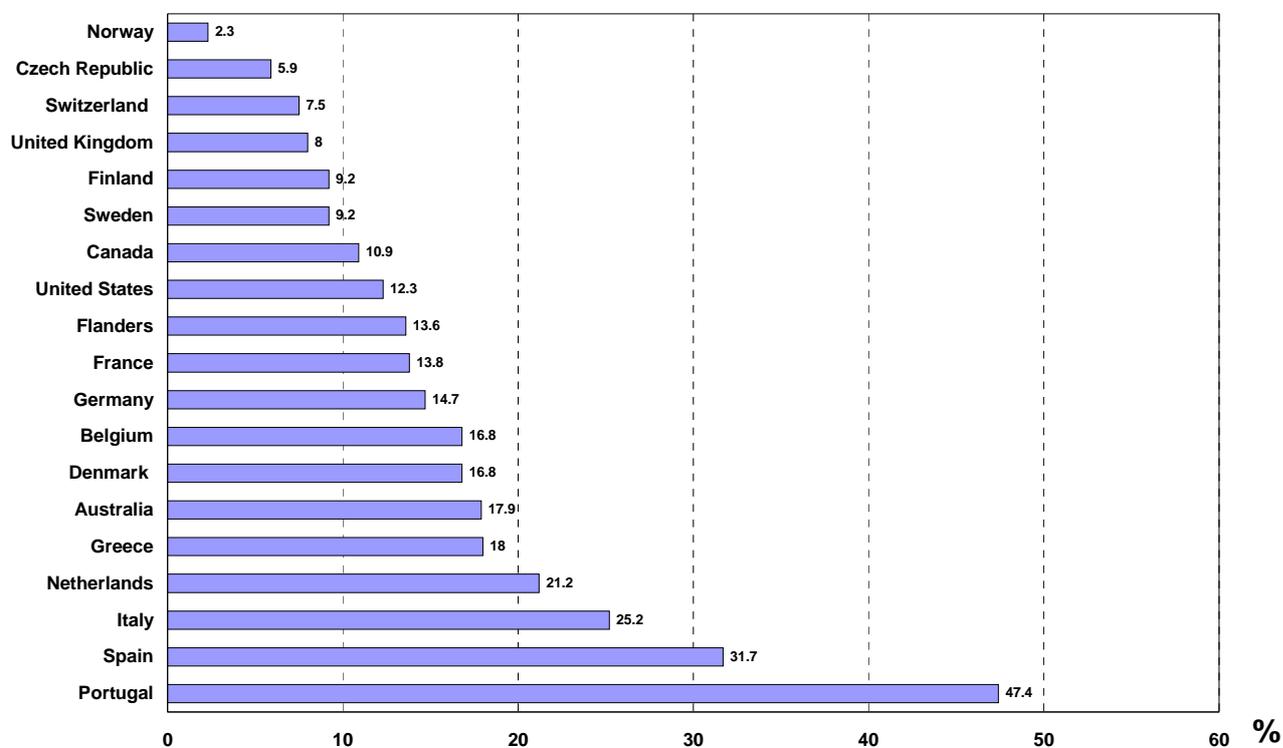
Figure 4: Percentage of 15-year-olds performing at each level of proficiency on the PISA reading scale



Note: due to rounding off, the sum of the percentages is not always equal to 100
 Source: De Meyer, I, e.a. (2005), Learning for tomorrow's problems in Flanders - Table p. 35

APPENDIX 4 – Unqualified and early school leavers

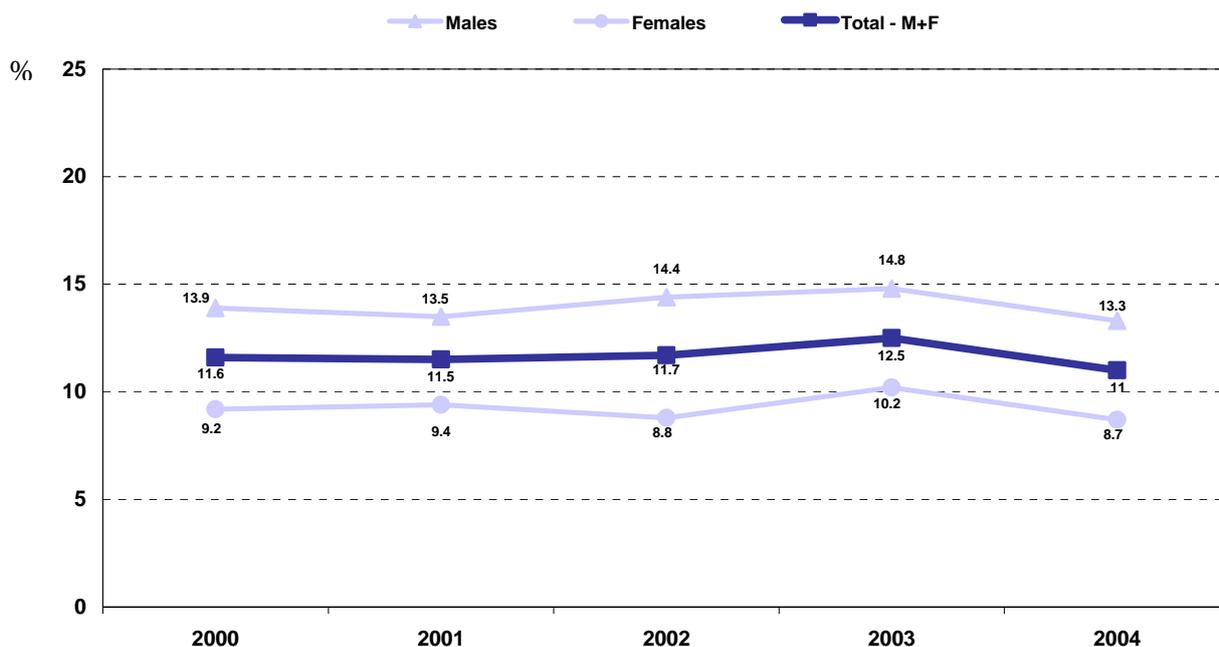
Figure 4: Percentage of 20 to 24-year-olds who are not in education and have not attained upper secondary education (OECD, 2002)



Source: OECD; Education at a glance 2004 - Table C5.1

Figure 5: Trends in the percentage of Flemish early school leavers by gender (2000-2004)

(European definition of early school leavers: 18 to 24-year-olds who achieved education at ISCED level 2 or less and who are not attending any further education or training.)



Source: Eurostat LFS & Steunpunt Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Vorming (SWAV)

APPENDIX 5 – Predictors for leaving school unqualified: social background characteristics

Table 3: Chance of leaving school with a higher secondary education qualification in percentage change (computed using the logistic regression coefficients) (Based upon longitudinal data gathered between September 1990 and June 1999)

Parents' education*	Father no work / home language •	Father work / home language •	Father no work / home language =	Father work / home language =
	Dutch	Dutch	Dutch	Dutch
1	54	64	69	77
2	57	67	75	82
3	61	71	81	86
4	65	74	85	90
5	68	77	89	92
6	72	79	91	94
7	75	82	93	96

Source: Douterlungne et al. (2001), Ongekwalficeerd: zonder paspoort?

* The variable “parents’ education” represents the educational attainment of both mother and father. At first the educational achievement level of each parent was categorised as followed:

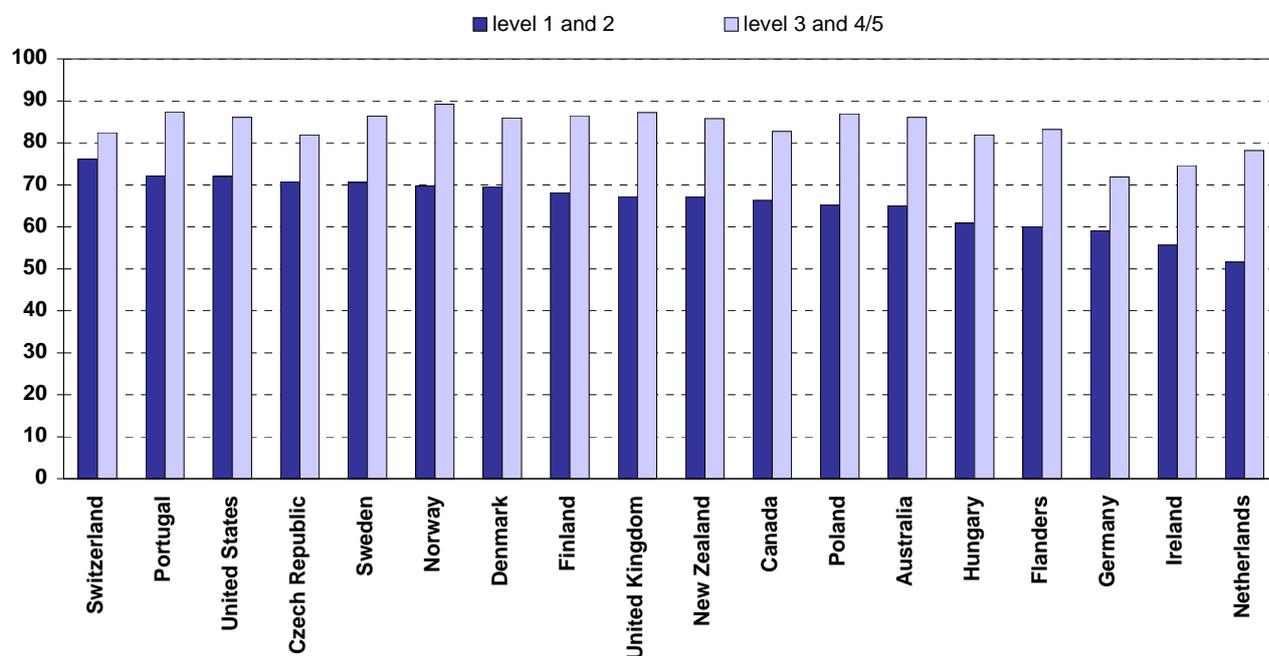
Degree of primary education	1
Degree of lower secondary education	2
Degree of higher secondary education	3
Degree of higher education or university	4

Afterwards both categorical variables were combined into the variable “parents’ education”, resulting in the 7 categories mentioned in the table above. The equation used during this process was:

$$\text{Parents' education} = \text{Education mother} + \text{education father} - 1$$

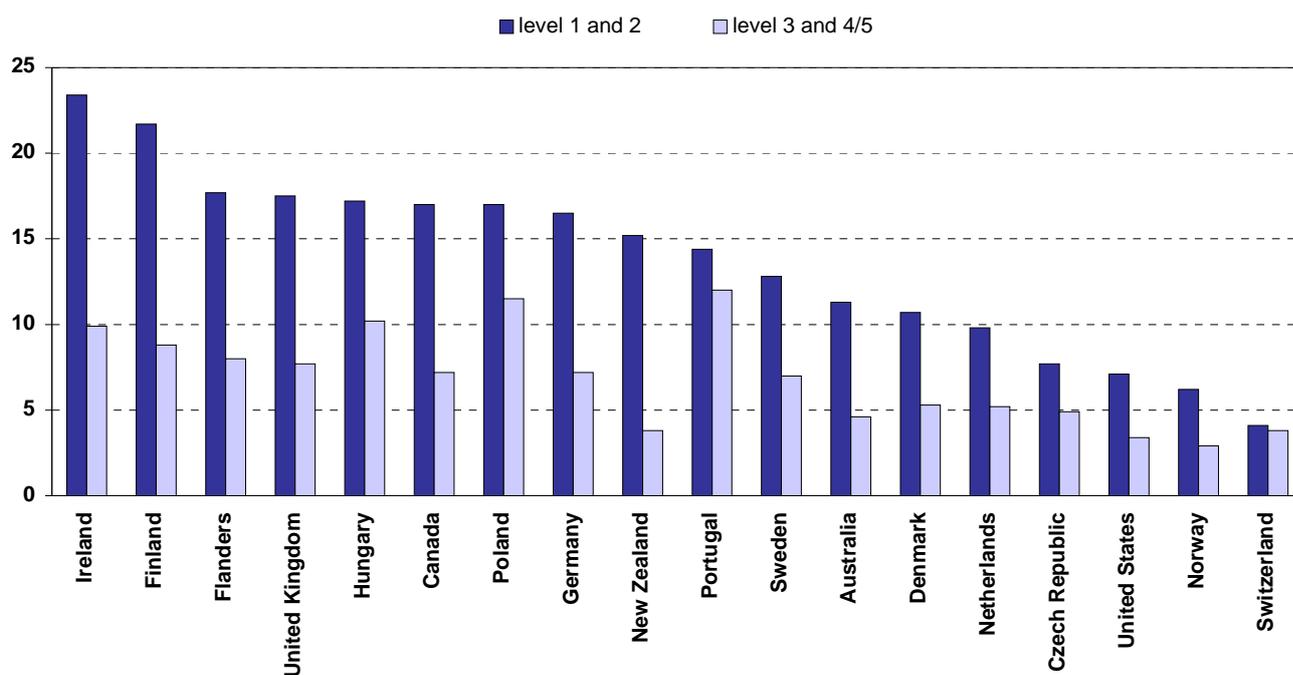
APPENDIX 6 – Labour force participation, unemployment and literacy proficiency (IALS data)

Figure 6: Rates of labour force participation by low (levels 1 and 2) and medium to high (levels 3 and 4/5) literacy proficiency for the IALS document scale, population aged 25-65, 1994-1998



Note: countries are ranked by the labour force participation of those at Levels 1 and 2.
Source: OECD (2000), Literacy in the information age - Table 3.6

Figure 7: Unemployment rate by low (levels 1 and 2) and medium to high (levels 3 and 4/5) literacy proficiency for the IALS document scale, population aged 25-65, 1994-1998



Note: countries are ranked by the incidence of unemployment of those at Levels 1 and 2.
Source: OECD (2000), Literacy in the information age - Table 3.7

APPENDIX 7 – Labour force participation and unemployment rates for Flemish adults with different levels of educational attainment (Data Eurostat – Labour Force Survey and National Institute for Statistics)

Figure 8: Rates of labour force participation for adults with a low level of schooling (ISCED level 2 or below) versus adults with a high level of schooling (ISCED level 5 or above) - population aged 15-64

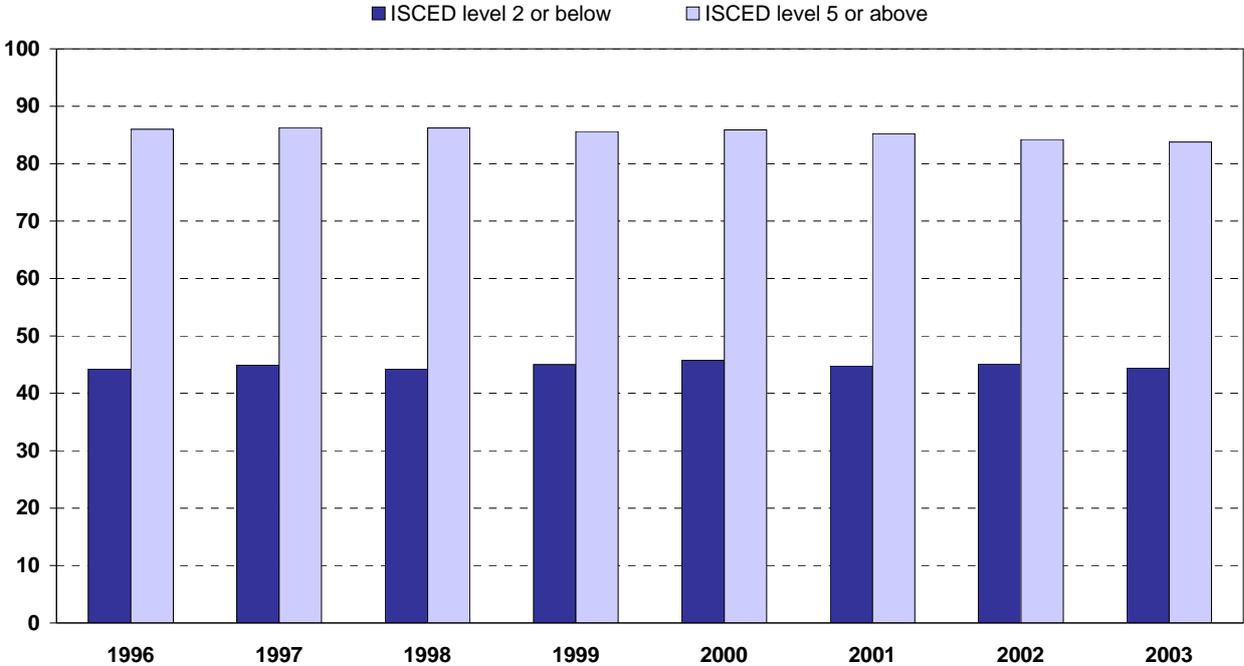
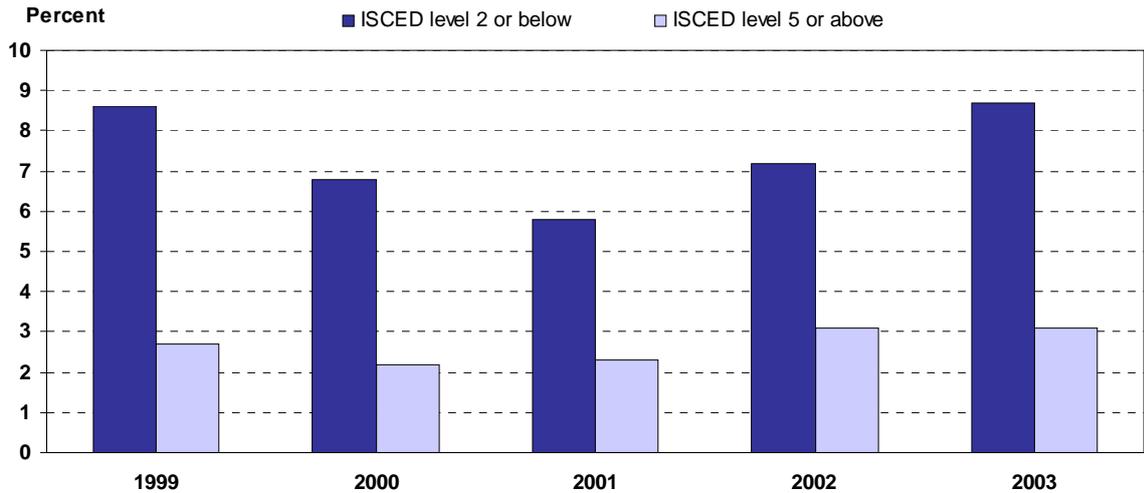
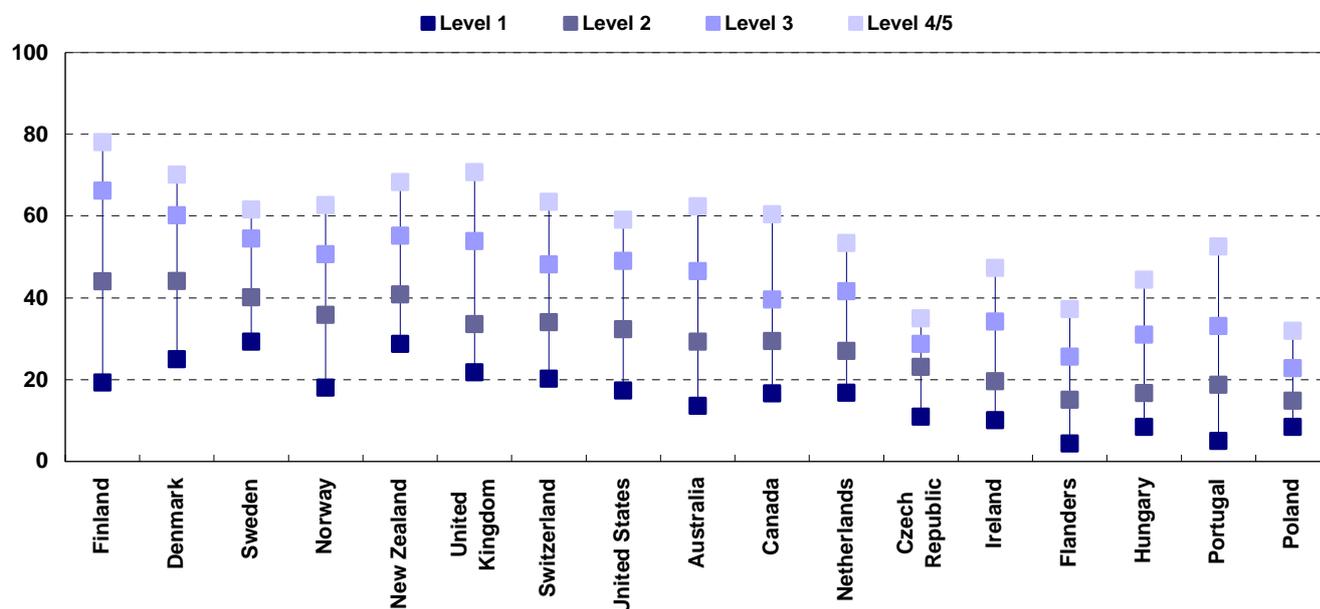


Figure 9: Unemployment rate for adults with a low level of schooling (ISCED level 2 or below) versus adults with a high level of schooling (ISCED level 5 or above) - population aged 15-64



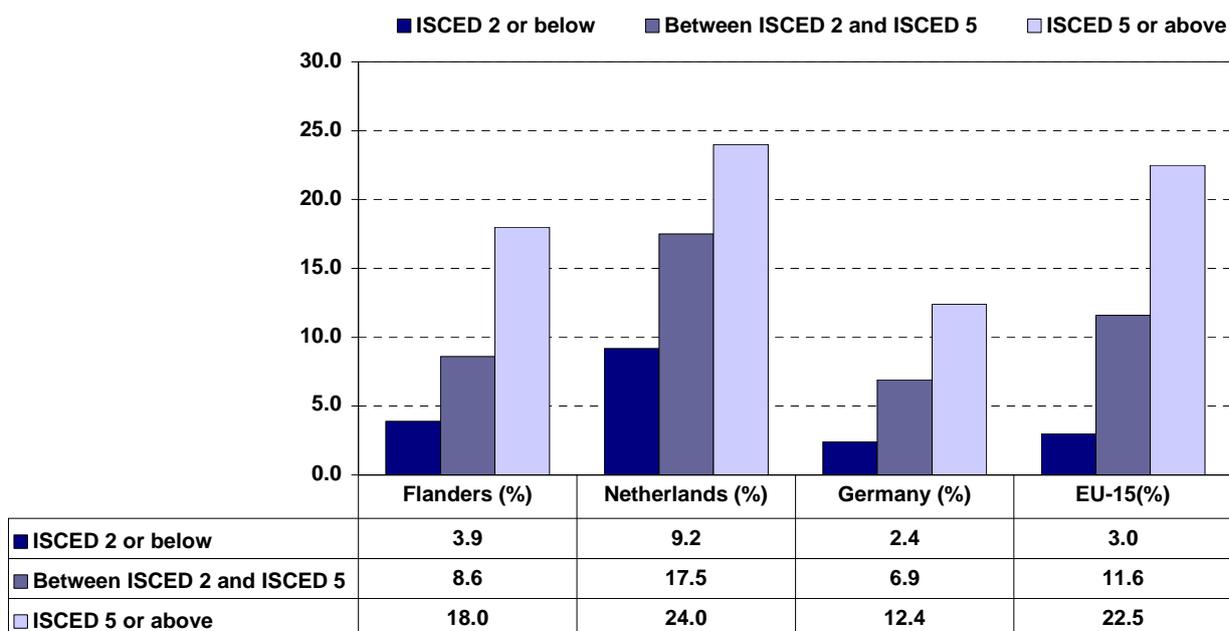
APPENDIX 8 – Participation in adult education and formal training

Figure 10: Percentage of adults participating in adult education and training during the year preceding the interview at each literacy level (IALS document scale, population aged 25-65, 1994-1998)



Source: OECD (2000), Literacy in the information age – Figure 3.12 and Table 3.12

Figure 11: Percentage of adults participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey by level of schooling (Data Eurostat – Labour Force Survey and National Institute for Statistics, population aged 25-64, 2004)



APPENDIX 9 – “Social” outcomes of literacy

Table 4: Percentage of women (aged 15 and over) who declare that they had a cervix smear test in the past three years by level of education (Data: Scientific Institute of Public Health - Health Interview Survey – Flemish region only)

	1997		2001		2004	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
ISCED ≤ 2	49.9	50.1	42.2	57.8	41.2	58.8
ISCED 3	61.3	38.7	61.8	38.2	59.9	40.1
ISCED ≥ 4	72.6	27.4	68.6	31.4	67.4	32.6

Table 5: Distribution (%) of the population according to the quality of support they receive from their social environment by level of education (Data: Scientific Institute of Public Health - Health Interview Survey – Flemish region only)

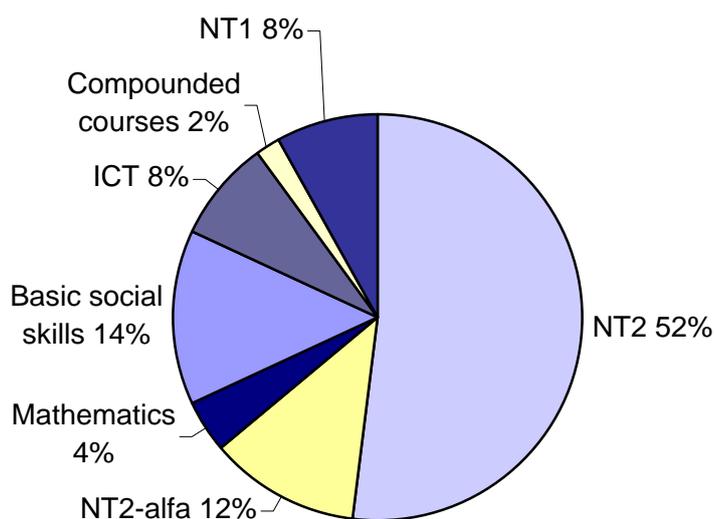
	2001						2004					
	ISCED ≤ 2		ISCED 3		ISCED > 4		ISCED ≤ 2		ISCED 3		ISCED > 4	
	Rather positive perception	Rather negative perception										
Quality of social support	87.9	10.8	93.8	6.2	96.9	3.1	90.2	9.8	93.8	6.2	96.6	3.4
Quality of affective support	88.4	11.6	94.2	5.8	96.8	3.2	90.9	9.1	92.6	7.4	95.1	4.9
Quality of emotional support	91.6	8.4	94.7	5.3	97.8	2.2	92.8	7.2	95	5	97.7	2.3
Quality of instrumental support	88.1	11.9	92.5	7.5	96.7	3.3	90.1	9.9	93.3	6.7	95.2	4.8
Quality of recreative support	90	10	95.7	4.3	98.5	1.5	92.8	7.2	95.8	4.2	97.8	2.2

APPENDIX 10 – Participation in adult basic education

Table 6: Number of students enrolled in adult basic education per school year (Data: Ministry of the Flemish Community – Education Department, Statistical yearbooks of the Flemish education)

School year	Number of students enrolled	Growth compared to the school year 1990-1991
1990-1991	7 085	100%
1991-1992	8 672	122%
1992-1993	10 090	142%
1993-1994	11 874	168%
1994-1995	12 918	182%
1995-1996	13 384	189%
1996-1997	13 724	194%
1997-1998	15 118	213%
1998-1999	17 542	248%
1999-2000	19 472	259%
2000-2001	21 213	299%
2001-2002	26 387	372%
2002-2003	24 662	348%
2003-2004	25 967	367%
2004-2005	26 188	370%

Figure 12: Percentage of enrolment per type of course offered within adult basic education (Data: Ministry of the Flemish Community – Education Department, Onderwijspeil 2003-2004)

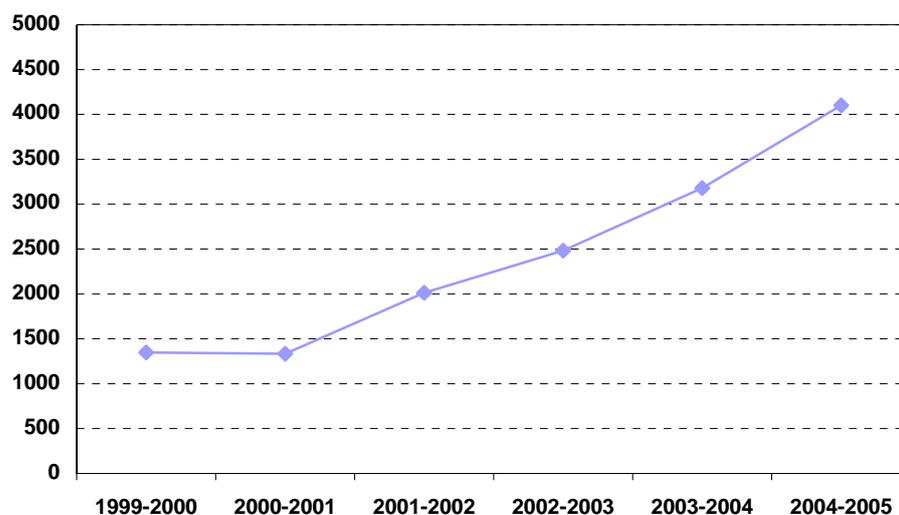


APPENDIX 11 – Participation in continuing education

Table 7: Number of students enrolled in continuing education (OSP) overall and in the courses of general formation (= second chance education) per school year (Data: Ministry of the Flemish Community – Education Department, Statistical yearbooks of the Flemish education)

School year	Number of students enrolled in continuing education (or Social Advancement Education – OSP)	Number of students enrolled in one of the courses of general formation	% of students in continuing education following one of the courses of general formation
1999-2000	170 062	1 349	0,8%
2000-2001	232 912	1 334	0,6%
2001-2002	251 529	2 012	0,9%
2002-2003	266 767	2 483	0,9%
2003-2004	270 919	3 180	1,2%
2004-2005	291 237	4 099	1,4%

Figure 13: Evolution of the number of students enrolled in one of the courses of general formation (Data: Ministry of the Flemish Community – Education Department, Statistical yearbooks of the Flemish education)



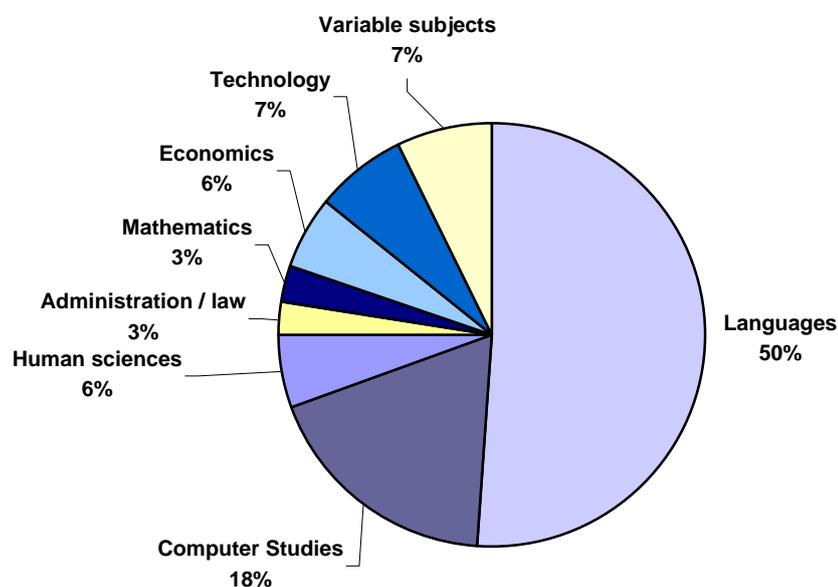
APPENDIX 12 – Participation in Supervised Individual Study

Table 8: Number of adults enrolled in supervised individual study (BIS) per year (Data: Ministry of the Flemish Community – Education Department, Statistical yearbooks of the Flemish education)

Year	Number of adults enrolled
1999	48 882
2000	40 613*
2001	23 342*
2002	24 342
2003	29 159
2004	25 453

Note: The major decline in number of participants in 2000 and 2001 is due to a change in policy. Because too many people started a BIS-course without thoroughly considering their participation, from May 2000 on a system of registration fees was introduced. This reduced the number of registrations substantially, but the numbers of participants that actually studied a course within the BIS-system barely changed.

Figure 14: Percentage of enrolment per type of course offered within BIS in 2004 (Data: Ministry of the Flemish Community – Education Department, Statistical yearbook of the Flemish education, 2004-2005)

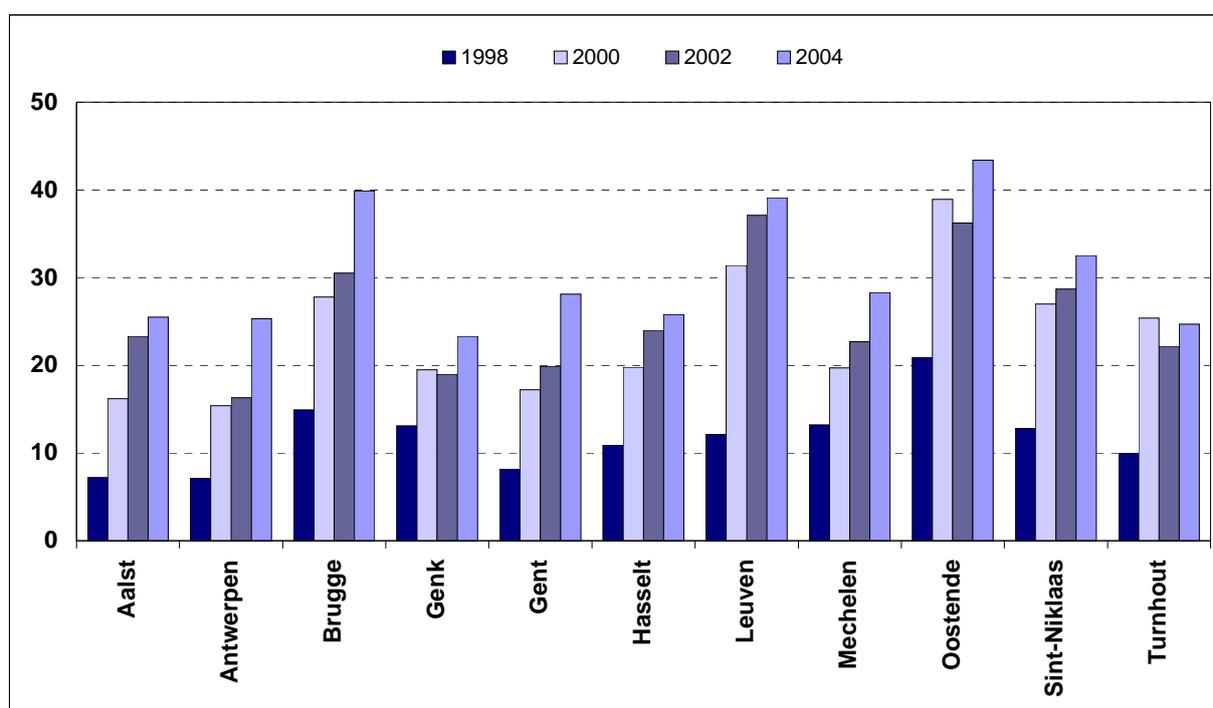


APPENDIX 13 – Participation of low educated unemployed adults in vocational training offered by the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB)

Table 9: Percentage of low educated unemployed adults (degree of ISCED 2 or below) who followed a vocational training offered by the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training by city (Data: VDAB, 1998-2004)

	1998	2000	2002	2004
Aalst	7.2	16.2	23.3	25.5
Antwerpen	7.1	15.4	16.3	25.3
Brugge	14.9	27.8	30.5	39.9
Genk	13.1	19.5	19.0	23.3
Gent	8.2	17.2	19.9	28.1
Hasselt	10.9	19.8	24.0	25.8
Leuven	12.1	31.4	37.1	39.1
Mechelen	13.2	19.7	22.7	28.3
Oostende	20.9	38.9	36.2	43.4
Sint-Niklaas	12.8	27.0	28.7	32.5
Turnhout	10.0	25.4	22.2	24.7

Figure 14: Percentage of low educated unemployed adults (degree of ISCED 2 or below) who followed a vocational training offered by the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training by city (Data: VDAB, 1998-2004)



APPENDIX 14 – Features of the (vocational) training offered by “outside organisations”

Table 10: Number of persons following a jobseeker training organised by an outside organisation in 2002 per type of training (Data: VDAB, based on the data in their system for student guidance)

Type of training	Number of persons enrolled
Application training and guidance	239
Specialised vocational training (technical training targeted at one profession in particular)	2 141
Personal (social) training	565
Apprenticeships, social workplaces, individualized on-the-job trainings, etc.	6 673
TOTAL	9 618

Table 11: Characteristics of the persons who started a jobseeker training organised by an outside organisation in 2002 (Data: VDAB, based on the data in their system for student guidance)

		%	
Gender	male	57	
	female	43	
Education	primary education	21	(27%)
	degree in entrepreneurship	2	(2.5%)
	lower secondary education	36	(45%)
	higher secondary education	17	(21%)
	higher education	4	(4.5%)
	foreign degree	20	
Duration of unemployment	< 6 months	29	
	between 6 months and 1 year	17	
	between 1 and 5 years	43	
	> 5 years	11	
Age	< 25 years old	42	
	between 25 and 30 years old	16	
	between 30 and 40 years old	25	
	> 40 years old	17	
Nationality	Belgian	78	
	European (EU)	2	
	Non-EU	20	

Note: the percentages between brackets represent the educational attainment levels of the persons enrolled when the students with foreign diplomas aren't considered.

APPENDIX 15 – 10 key objectives of the Flemish “Strategic literacy plan” (2003)

- 1. Increase participation in basic education and focus on specific target groups**
Main target is to increase the participation of Dutch adults with basic skill needs in adult basic education and more specifically in the language and maths courses.
- 2. Screening of “target groups at risk”**
There should be a systematic literacy screening for job seekers embarking on an integration pathway.
- 3. Partnership with enterprises (employers), sectoral funds and trade-unions**
Employers, sectoral funds and trade-unions will be mobilised to invest in work-related literacy courses as well as incentives for workers to participate.
- 4. Elaborate networking**
There should be networking between all organisations offering language and mathematics courses and the organisations of the socio-cultural and social welfare sector. Furthermore the training offer should also be imbedded in other settings (for example in prisons and community work projects).
- 5. Detecting specific needs and learning difficulties**
The government will promote a survey to discover the extent the literacy level of adults with learning difficulties, limited learning capacities and mental disabilities can be improved.
- 6. Supporting communication-action**
The government will establish the contours of a communication-action plan, which should support the policy actions, call the attention to the literacy problem and improve the intake and placement of students in the appropriate courses.
- 7. Stimulate quality improvement and reduce drop-out**
The sector of adult basic education already started a process to enhance flexibility, and to introduce a modular structure, but in the future they should focus more on quality improvement. This will be achieved through the development of educational profiles for the courses adult basic education offers and through the establishment of a certification system for the sector. Those certificates will be attached to the diploma structure of the formal adult education.
- 8. Stimulate ICT-literacy**
When establishing pathways for adults with basic skill needs special attention will be devoted to acquiring ICT-skills and to the integration of ICT through computer supported learning.
- 9. Importance of “dual tracks”**
“Dual tracks” combining literacy and job-related training will be stimulated. Furthermore special attention should be given to the integration of language and math courses in existing education and/or training.
- 10. Reducing the number of unqualified school leavers**
Minimal literacy skills should be part of the starting qualifications education offers. For youngsters at risk of leaving school unqualified, the acquisition of basic language and mathematics skills should be mentioned explicitly in their training.

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LEGISLATION

Decreet van 12 juli 1990 houdende de regeling van basiseducatie voor laaggeschoolde volwassenen.
[Decree of 12 July 1990 regarding basic adult education for adults with low basic skills.]
B.S./M.B. 18/07/1990.

Decreet van 16 april 1996 met betrekking tot de lerarenopleiding en nascholing.
[Decree of 16 April 1996 with regard to teacher training and in-service training.]
B.S./M.B. 12/06/1996.

Besluit van de Vlaamse regering van 24 juli 1996 betreffende de leertijd, bedoeld bij het decreet van 23 januari 1991 betreffende de vorming en de begeleiding van de zelfstandigen en de kleine en middelgrote ondernemingen.
[Order of the Flemish government of 24 July 1996 regarding apprenticeships, referring to the decree of 23 January 1991 regarding the training and guidance of entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises.]
B.S./M.B. 30/08/1996.

Decreet van 2 maart 1999 tot regeling van een aantal aangelegenheden van het volwassenenonderwijs.
[Decree of 2 March 1999 regulating a number of matters relative to adult education.]
B.S./M.B. 10/04/1999.

Decreet van 13 april 1999 tot wijziging van de decreten betreffende de inspectie en begeleidingsdiensten.
[Decree of 13 April 1999 modifying the decrees regarding the inspection and supervisory services.]
B.S./M.B. 15/09/1999.