A Skills beyond School Commentary on Flanders

Pauline Musset
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Summary: Strengths and challenges

Strengths

- Decentralisation and local autonomy supports an innovative and entrepreneurial approach at institutional and local level.
- The adult education system is strong, with centres for adult education throughout the country playing a key role in second chance education as well as in higher level vocational skills development.
- Recent policy initiatives aim to improve strategic coherence in the system without damaging its diversity.
- The qualifications framework provides a systematic means of organising and relating different programmes of study.
- Recent legislation supports the development of recognition of prior learning in Flanders.
- Transitions from vocational programmes to both the labour market and higher education are relatively smooth.

Challenges

- Some programmes are insufficiently informed by the needs of the labour market.
- The involvement of employers in the content and the organisation of programmes may remain a challenge.
- Workplace training is insufficiently integrated into some programmes.
- There are too few data, particularly on labour market outcomes.
- The qualification requirements for teachers and trainers may not give sufficient weight to industry knowledge and experience.
The commentary on Flanders and its place in the wider OECD study

This commentary is one of a series of country reports on vocational education and training (VET) in OECD countries, prepared as part of an OECD study (see Box 1). The series includes reviews, involving an in-depth analysis of a country system leading to a set of policy recommendations backed by analysis. The commentaries are simpler exercises, largely descriptive but also including an assessment of strengths and challenges in the country system. The commentaries are designed to be of value as free-standing reports, but are also prepared so that they can become the first phase of a full review, should a country so wish.

Box 1 Skills beyond School: The OECD study of postsecondary vocational education and training

Increasingly countries look beyond secondary school to more advanced qualifications to provide the skills needed in many of the fastest growing technical and professional jobs in OECD economies. The OECD study, Skills beyond School, is addressing the range of policy questions arising, including funding and governance, matching supply and demand, quality assurance and equity and access. The study will build on the success of the previous OECD study of vocational education and training Learning for Jobs which examined policy through 17 country reviews and a comparative report. The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD Skills Strategy (OECD, 2012a).

Full country policy reviews are being conducted in Austria, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan, Korea, Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (with case studies of Florida, Maryland and Washington State). Shorter exercises leading to an OECD country commentary will be undertaken in Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Iceland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and in Northern Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Background reports will be prepared in all these countries, and in France and Hungary.

See: www.oecd.org/education/vet

This commentary describes the context of the wider OECD study, outlines the main features of the Flemish VET system, and compares its main features with those of other countries. It also sets out a number of key statistical indicators comparing Flanders (and Belgium) with different OECD countries. These cover both the education system and the labour market. It then provides a brief assessment of the main strengths of the system, and the policy challenges which need to be addressed.
This commentary was prepared using a standard methodology. The Flemish authorities provided a background report (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013) following which an OECD team made a visit to Flanders on 13-15 May 2013, where the team discussed issues arising with a range of policy makers, stakeholders and staff and students in training institutions.

The background: Education, training and the labour market in Flanders

The labour market

Table 1 displays some relevant labour market indicators for Belgium as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Belgium’s labour market</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the Flemish economy, trade and services represent about 60% of the GDP, followed by steel production (almost 10%), the chemical industry (approx. 5%), and the textile industry. GDP growth in the Flemish region was estimated at 1.7% in 2011 and 1.8% in 2012 (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Over the period 2007 to 2010, the youth unemployment rate (for 15-24 year-olds) remained around 19% in Belgium as a whole, while it increased in the EU27 from 16% to 21%. In Flanders, the rate passed from 12% to 13% (Eurostat, 2012).

In Flanders, a large number of jobs remain vacant in 162 identified professions, with particular shortages of IT engineers, engineers and nurses. 88 of these professions require a diploma above secondary education but below a bachelor’s degree (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

A Eurostat Labour Force Survey dataset (2009) allows an estimation of the occupational profile of postsecondary VET graduates in comparison with those with other qualifications (see Figure 1). In Belgium, young workers (25-34 year-olds) with postsecondary vocational qualifications are more likely to work in the high skill occupations of professionals and technicians than people with upper secondary education or less. Workers with postsecondary vocational qualifications are less likely to work in elementary jobs, services and craft jobs than individuals with lower education levels.1
Figure 1 Distribution of workers (25-34 year-olds) by type of education across occupations

2009


**Education and training for young people: A snapshot**

In Flanders, education is compulsory until the age of 18, requiring students to spend at least 28 hours per week in education and training, or education and training combined with work. Primary education normally enrols students from age 6 to 12. Secondary education includes three stages, each two years long. In the first stage, there are two streams, A and B. In principle, education is comprehensive in the A stream, although students are already in secondary schools, which each provide one or more tracks of secondary education. The first year of the B stream aims to give students enhanced support with the aim of entering the A stream, but in practice most students continue into a second pre-vocational year, and few transfer into the second year of the A stream. Those who complete the first stage in the A stream can progress to all second stage options, while those who complete the B stream are only eligible for BSO or part-time VET (i.e. Syntra apprenticeship, DBSO) (Kis, 2010).
After the first stage of secondary education, students may choose between, or are directed into, four full-time and two part-time tracks. The full-time tracks are offered by secondary schools and include general education (ASO), technical education (TSO), artistic education (KSO) and vocational education (BSO). At the end of secondary technical education (TSO) students can follow an optional additional specialisation year (Se-n-se) to obtain a professional certificate. These programmes are also offered by centres for adult education. The part-time options include part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO) offered by part-time secondary schools, and apprenticeships (leertijd) offered by Syntra training centres.

In Belgium as a whole 82% of 25-34 year-olds have at least upper secondary qualifications, similar to the OECD average (OECD, 2013a, Table A1.2a). Participation in education is on the rise: the proportion of 15-19 year-olds enrolled in education increased to 94% in 2011 from 81% in 2000 (OECD, 2013a, Table C1.2.). These data are not available for Flanders alone.

Flanders is one of the 24 participants in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) that assessed the proficiency of adults from age 16 onwards in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. Results are reported in OECD, 2013b.

Postsecondary and continuing vocational programmes

The Flemish authorities asked the OECD to look at a variety of different vocational programmes in this commentary: Se-n-se programmes offered by secondary schools; associate degree programmes, offered by adult education centres and university colleges, and professional bachelors programmes offered by university colleges; as well as programmes offered by Syntra (the Flemish agency for Entrepreneurial Training – targeting self-employed people) and VDAB (the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Services, for unemployed people) (see Table 2).
### Table 2 Student enrolment in secondary education, postsecondary and continuing VET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary education</td>
<td>ASO</td>
<td>62,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TSO</td>
<td>41,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BSO</td>
<td>2,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DBSO</td>
<td>31,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fourth stage BSO</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprenticeships 1</td>
<td>5,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>144,325</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>Basic education</td>
<td>45,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>322,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>368,027</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary VET</td>
<td>Sen-n-se</td>
<td>2,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate degrees 1</td>
<td>17,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional bachelors 1</td>
<td>94,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>114,887</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNTRA</td>
<td>Vocational courses</td>
<td>28,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDAB</td>
<td>On-the-job training</td>
<td>49,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>38,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>87,679</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University programmes</td>
<td>Academic bachelors 2</td>
<td><strong>71,772</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** 1: reference date 2010-2011; 2: reference date 2012-2013; for the others, reference date 2011-2012. The number of students in associate degrees does not include the nurses in training.


**Se-n-se**

An optional additional specialisation year after completing the third stage of TSO (Se-n-se) allows students to obtain a professional certificate, in 22 occupational fields. Se-n-se programmes are short in duration (one year) and take place in secondary schools.
Associate degree programmes

In parallel to the Bologna process, the established two-year short-cycle higher education programmes and qualifications, known as graduaat programmes, including the part-time ones and those offered by centres for adult education (Kirsch, 2010), were transformed into associate degree programmes. These can be two years or two-and-a-half years and they are linked to a professional qualification (see section on the Flemish Qualifications Framework for more information). Programmes can be delivered by both centres for adult education and university colleges.

Since 2009, university colleges are required to design “short-cycle” programmes into their professional bachelors programmes, when some of the content overlaps. Labour market demand for these short-cycle higher education programmes is high (fifth level of the Flemish and European qualification framework) (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Reform continues: a new act under development will oblige the centres for adult education and university colleges (as well as the schools for secondary education in the case of nursing programmes) to offer the associate degree programmes only as joint degree programmes, in order to improve collaboration between stakeholders and facilitate transition to bachelor degrees provided by university colleges.
Flanders has gradually introduced the bachelor-master degree structure since 2004, while at the same time creating a binary divide between professionally-oriented and academic bachelor degrees. The professional bachelor programmes are oriented towards direct entry into the labour market. With a bridging programme, students can also continue into a master’s programme. There are currently 67 professional bachelor programmes in 22 university colleges, divided into 10 study areas (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Until recently professional and academic bachelor programmes were provided by both university colleges and universities, but from the academic year 2013/2014 the academic programmes in university colleges have been transferred to university, and the professional bachelors, to university colleges (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

The VDAB school leavers study shows that one year after graduation, less than 7% of professional bachelors graduates were still looking for work, and less than 2% had had no work experience (VDAB, 2010).

Programmes offered by centres for adult education

Centres for adult education offer programmes at lower and upper secondary levels, and at postsecondary levels (see previous section on associate degree programmes also offered by the centres for adult education). Since 2007 programmes have been modular. In secondary adult education, vocational modules combined with general education can lead to a diploma of secondary education. Vocational modules can also be followed separately, each leading to a certificate.

There are currently 420 different programmes in secondary adult education. Data on labour market outcomes are not available (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Programmes offered by VDAB

VDAB (the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency) offers full-time training for the unemployed (and employees in some cases), which may be a complete training programme towards an occupation, training for specific technical skills, or for key competences (e.g. literacy, numeracy). VDAB has 87 competence centres, grouped in 40 campuses. Six months after finishing the training, 57% of jobseekers were in employment in 2009 (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Programmes offered by SYNTRA Vlaanderen

Syntra Vlaanderen (Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training) operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Work and Social Economy, with ties also to the Ministry of Education. It subsidises and monitors 24 training centres across Flanders. Syntra provides training in the following key areas: apprenticeship, entrepreneurial training, additional specialised training, and tailor-made programmes for companies. It aims at creating more and better entrepreneurs. Their courses are open to the general public but aim more specifically at preparing self-employed entrepreneurs, giving them the technical and managerial skills to start and run their own business. Syntra provides 500 different vocational programmes within 28 sectors.

Governance and funding

The three main educational networks include both secondary schools and centres for adult education.

- GO! Education of the Flemish Community is publicly run education, organised by the public body GO! Onderwijs van de
Vlaamse Gemeenschap, acting under the authority of the Flemish Community. GO! Education is required to be secular.

- Publicly funded, publicly run education (OGO) includes that organised by local municipal authorities, and by provincial authorities. The governing bodies of this education network are united in two umbrella organisations: the Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (OVSG) and the Flemish Provincial Education (POV).

- Publicly funded, privately run schools (VGO) deliver education organised by private entities. The governing body is often a non-profit organisation (vzw). Catholic schools, associated in the umbrella body Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO) play a major role.

Vocational programmes provided in secondary schools, centres for adult education and university colleges are supervised by the Flemish Ministry for Education, with the exception of a few vocational programmes which are under the responsibility of other ministries of the Flemish community. SYNTRA and VDAB programmes fall under the responsibility of the Flemish Ministry for Work.

The funding formula for secondary education takes into account, among other factors, the educational track and occupational field, and the socio-economic background of students. Adult education centres are subsidised by the Ministry of Education and Training on the basis of teaching hours. The operational budget of centres depends mainly on registration fees, paid by students. The registration fee is limited to EUR 1.15 per hour and to a maximum of EUR 460 per course for secondary education programmes, and EUR 574 for associate degrees. Means-tested financial support is available to students.

University colleges, which offer associate degrees and professional bachelor courses, are fully funded by the Ministry of Education and Training and have full autonomy over their budget. Students pay registration fees.

**Indicators of education and training**

**Participation in non-formal learning**

Adult participation in education and training reveals the extent to which later on in life, adults can catch up in response to missed opportunities in initial education, and augment basic skills with additional qualifications. In 2007, 33% of 25-64 year-olds participated in non-formal training in Belgium, just around the OECD average (OECD, 2012b, Table C6.4b).
Figure 3 How many adults participate in non-formal education

Percentage of 25-34 and 55-64 year-olds respondents reporting that they participate in a non-formal educational activity in 2007

Note: non-formal learning includes: taking any classes or having a tutor to improve basic skills; being in a formal apprenticeship programme; taking courses that were not part a degree or diploma programme - including work or career-related courses workshops whether or not they had a job when they took them, and all courses related to personal interest or hobbies.


Labour market indicators

Employment rates of those with upper secondary or tertiary education level were 75% on average in 2011 in Belgium, and the employment rates for those who have not finished upper secondary education are significantly lower, at 45% (OECD, 2013a, Table A5.3a).
Transition from education to work: NEETs

In Belgium, 14% of individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 were neither employed, nor in education or training (NEET) in 2011, similar to the OECD average of 16% (OECD, 2013a). School dropouts make up the bulk of NEET youth: many lack any qualification, come from immigrant and/or minority backgrounds and/or live in disadvantaged, rural or remote areas. The lack of relevant skills implies a greater risk of low earnings, unemployment and welfare-dependency (OECD, 2012d).
In Belgium, 84% of people with tertiary education are employed, almost ten percentage points higher than for those with upper secondary and postsecondary non-tertiary attainment (74%) and 35 percentage points above the people whose highest educational attainment is below upper secondary education (48%) (OECD, 2013a).


Previous OECD analysis and recommendations

Several previous OECD reviews bear on the Flemish education system and the labour market: the 2007 Jobs for Youth review of Belgium (OECD, 2007); the 2010 Learning for Jobs review of vocational education and training in Flanders (OECD, 2010); the 2011 review of school evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium (Shewbridge et al., 2011); and the 2011 Economic survey for Belgium (OECD, 2011).

The *Jobs for Youth* review (OECD, 2007) for Belgium as a whole, found that unemployment mainly affects young people with few educational
qualifications, especially those living in the Brussels and Wallonia regions. To improve youth employment, the report recommended:

- Take early, co-ordinated and sustained action. In Belgium, action is often taken too late, when young people have already begun to drop out from school. Co-ordinated action involving children, their families, teachers and social workers should be taken even before the end of compulsory education to prevent failure at school.

- Take steps to make the transition from school to work less abrupt, by improving apprenticeship programmes.

- Reform part-time education to attract more pupils, including the best pupils. In Belgium, part-time secondary education is a stream to which pupils are relegated if they have failed to do well in mainstream education.

The OECD’s *Learning for Jobs Review of Belgium Flanders* (Kis, 2010) commends the good range of vocational options at different levels, the strong commitment to universal upper secondary education, dynamic policy development and the attention given to entrepreneurial training. The review recommended, among other matters, strengthening core general skills in vocational programmes, postponing tracking at least until the age of 14 and making education in the period preceding tracking fully comprehensive, sustaining and further developing workplace training, and ensuring that the mix of provision is more responsive to labour market needs.

Shewbridge et al., (2011), looking at school evaluation, encouraged the focus of the government and communities on the improvement of school outcomes through tools for the measurement of student progress and the added value that the school brings to their learning process. Additionally, it argues that students’ background characteristics and prior learning should be taken into account. It also recommends that the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training should collaborate more closely with the schools and relevant stakeholders.

The 2011 Economic Survey argues that relatively positive labour market conditions overall disguise a structural unemployment problem: school leavers and those with low skills face great difficulties in the Belgium labour market. Those in this group often experience shorter periods of employment than in most other OECD countries, during the first five years after leaving school. The review suggests reform of labour market institutions in order to improve access for outsiders and enhanced labour market participation incentives, and strengthened apprenticeships, internships and other systems to mix school, training and work. According to this review, there are
insufficient incentives for students to work part-time while studying (OECD, 2011).

Strengths and challenges

This section of the commentary provides an assessment both of the strengths of the Flemish VET system and the challenges it faces.

Strengths

Innovation and decentralisation

In the Flemish system, schools, centres for adult education and university colleges enjoy far-reaching autonomy. School boards, responsible for one or several educational establishments, devise their own curricula, regulations, educational methods and personnel policies.\(^8\) Board members can be volunteers chosen by the parents or professionals paid by the networks (OECD/Specialists Schools and Academies Trust, 2008). The high level of institutional autonomy allows many bottom-up initiatives to respond to student demands in innovative ways. A particularly telling example is the development of distance learning and e-learning opportunities.

Programmes in centres of adult education are modular,\(^9\) which allow for a flexible organisation and several entry points for students. They offer daytime, evening and weekend courses, and distance learning.

The Regional Technological Centres are also a good example of innovation: these co-operative structures between educational and labour market partners, subsidised by the Department of Education and Training do not provide VET themselves, but aim to facilitate connections between companies and secondary schools or (to a lesser degree) centres for adult education,\(^10\) and act as collaborative platforms to share good practice at the local level.

Strong adult education system

Across OECD countries, the demographic downturn means that fewer young people will be entering the labour market. As a consequence, the relative importance of adult education in skilling the labour force is increasing. Good quality adult education can have a strong positive impact on productivity and the employment chances of individuals and ensure a more equitable distribution of skills by giving a second chance to those who missed out the first time around (OECD, 2005). Adult education systems can serve diverse purposes for different client groups. They can provide higher level job-specific training for young upper secondary graduates (such
as in teacher training and nursing programmes in university colleges in Denmark); upskilling for working adults in mid-career (for example, industrial master examinations in Germany, which prepare skilled workers to be foremen); “second chances” for working adults who dropped out of earlier education or training programmes (the US community colleges with open access policies serve this function among others); and opportunities for career shifts or to support a return to the labour market. An effective system should be able to meet all of these quite diverse needs.

In Flanders, the adult education system is particularly strong: centres for adult education have a good geographical coverage, and play an important role as providers of second chance education and basic skills remedial programmes. They also offer a large variety of vocational programmes at both upper secondary and postsecondary level. Efforts have been made to make programmes, in particular associate degrees, flexible, through modular provision, to facilitate the participation of working adults. VDAB and SYNTRA offer a wide variety of training programmes, tailored to the needs of the labour market and employers, of very variable lengths – from a few days to one year or more. Programmes are also tailored to individual needs: before starting VDAB programmes, the competences and basic skills of jobseekers are screened and the training adapted to existing skill levels (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Efforts to improve co-ordination across networks

OECD countries face a major challenge in managing multiple vocational institutions and programmes to deliver strategic coherence and co-ordination while at the same time encouraging diversity and innovation. The level of institutional autonomy, which is common at postsecondary level, while promoting local innovation, can add to the challenge of coherence and co-ordination. Potential problems linked to decentralisation, found in many countries, include:

- Unclarity for potential and actual students in the face of multiple pathways and sometimes competing offers.
- Unclarity for employers about the function and value of different qualifications.
- Difficulties in articulation and transitions between different institutions and programmes.

In Flanders, recent policy initiatives seek to strengthen strategic coherence and co-ordination of the system without damaging its diversity. Efforts have been made to improve the collaboration across stakeholders: at the national level, between the ministries of education and work but also at
local level. By law university colleges and centres for adult education have to co-operate in the delivery of degrees. Recently, 13 regional consortia were created to oversee the centres for adult education in June 2007. Their objectives are to optimise and align the provision offered by centres, and promote co-operation between centres, as well as with other institutions and local employers. Through their long-term education plans, consortia decide if centres can adjust or expand their provision.

Various recent initiatives aim to improve collaboration between sets of institutions (between university colleges, centres for adult education and VDAB, and in some cases universities) in particular through the creation of learning pathways across institutions (OKOT trajectories): VDAB learners can attend the same courses as Sen-n-se students and in second chance programmes in centres for adult education. VDAB and the Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education developed a quick-scan test to identify jobseekers’ literacy weaknesses, and if necessary, they are referred to a centre for adult education. In some parts of Flanders unemployed people can follow joint VDAB-associate degree programmes\(^\text{11}\) that take into account prior learning so that it is shortened to one year (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

A systematic qualifications framework

Many OECD countries are currently implementing qualification frameworks, or have done so recently. In principle, such frameworks can make vocational education and training systems more transparent, so that the value of different qualifications can be more clearly recognised by students, employers and other stakeholders. International experience shows that if frameworks are underpinned by a strong methodology for allocating qualifications to levels, supported by key stakeholders, and backed by complementary measures to unify the VET system and improve transitions, they can facilitate lifelong learning, and improve access to higher level education (OECD, 2010).

In Flanders, the development of a qualifications framework since 2009 aims to make the system more coherent, by making qualifications more transparent and comparable. Professional qualifications are in the process of being defined in terms of job competences.\(^\text{12}\) The COMPETENT\(^\text{13}\) system is developed and maintained by SERV, in link with the Flemish Qualifications Framework, and in collaboration with experts from social partners, sectors and other stakeholders.

With the use of the eight levels of the Flemish Qualifications Framework and the description of jobs in terms of competences, it will become clearer which programmes lead to the same qualification level and
to the same job. This should make qualifications equivalent regardless of where the students had been taught – in a centre for adult education, a university college, or even a VDAB competence centre. It will also give more visibility to the different qualifications for both students and employers. In the case of new qualifications, creating a new professional qualification starts with a screening process that determines how the qualification shall translate into an education programme and identifies providers best suited to deliver the programme. An internal agency, AKOV (Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training), was created in 2009 to co-ordinate and oversee the process, and to align the different quality control mechanisms for professional qualifications. An integrated quality assurance system is being developed, aiming to align professional VDAB and SYNTRA qualifications and centres for adult education qualifications. The fact that the qualifications are defined by competences should help to support recognition of prior learning (see following point on this).

To create a new associate degree or Se-n-se course, AKOV first needs to determine the level of the courses and the qualification it will be linked to, as well as the number of training places (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013). These processes aim to attune programmes better to the needs of the labour market.

Box 2 Steps in the development of a professional qualification

1. Description of a profession (done by SERV and sectoral social partners).
2. The description is handed over to AKOV.
3. Creation of a professional qualification dossier, based on the description (done by AKOV and sectoral social partners).
4. The qualification is validated (AKOV – interprofessional social partners, VDAB and Syntra).
5. The qualification is giving a level, within the Flemish Qualifications Framework (AKOV –social partners, Education, VDAB and Syntra and experts).
6. The qualification is handed over to the ministers concerned: education and training, work, health (in the case of health professions, etc.).
7. Approval of professional qualification (Flemish Government).
8. Registered in database (AKOV).

Recognition of prior learning

Across OECD countries, recognition of prior learning (RPL) – a process of certifying pre-existing skills and knowledge is used to make skills visible to other actors, such as employers and education and training institutions. It has numerous potential benefits:

- Through course exemptions it reduces the direct and opportunity costs of formal learning.
- It improves the efficiency of the labour market, by making acquired skills transparent.
- It helps adults with limited formal education to re-enter education and advance their careers.
- It rewards and therefore encourages learning in informal settings (Field et al., 2012).

Recognition of prior learning plays a significant role in many OECD countries in upskilling the labour force, making competences (often acquired informally) more transparent to employers, students, and education institutions. Box 3 sets out some relevant evidence from the United States. Despite these theoretical efficiencies, professional educators are sometimes reluctant to accept that the competences they teach can be acquired informally, education institutions sometimes have inadequate financial incentives to recognise prior learning, while employers may not always see advantage in making skills of their own employees more visible to competing firms. Assessing prior learning is also a significant challenge since informal learning is almost by definition undocumented. Credible and professional assessment of skills itself consumes resources.
Box 3 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) in the United States and in Iceland

In the US, RPL has its historical roots in the GI Bill and the experience of World War II veterans who were granted college credits in recognition of their military training. It has been estimated that about 50% of all colleges and universities in the US offer RPL in some form, though it may not always be marketed effectively. A recent review of state policies highlighted the role played by state-level task forces in building interest in RPL. In Tennessee the funding formula was altered so as to give colleges greater incentives to develop their use of RPL and therefore improve completion rates.

A major survey of 46 postsecondary institutions suggested some large potential benefits of RPL in practice as well as theory. Some 13% of RPL students enrolled in two-year programmes earned an associate degree compared with only 6% of non-RPL students. As the number of RPL credits increased, the average time to graduation decreased. For those gaining an associate degree the saving was between 1.5 and 4.5 months, compared to those without RPL credits. These correlations may partly reflect how RPL students are selected or select themselves, but the relationships are very strong. This suggests that RPL may be directly causing at least part of these documented benefits.

In Iceland the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has co-ordinated the development of a national strategy: both the 2008 Act on Upper Secondary Schools and the 2010 Act on Adult Learning contain provisions on individual entitlement to the validation of non-formal and informal learning at the upper secondary level. It is seen as a means of combating dropout. The centre has, through pilot projects, developed an RPL methodology with the main target group being people with poor formal education. Adults who wish to return to upper secondary school can use RPL to shorten the length of the required programme. The 12 lifelong learning centres around the country and the two centres for certified trades co-operate in pursuing RPL projects. On average a participant going through a validation process within the certified trades ends up with 28 units of credit recognised through RPL (the carpentry programme for example involves 100 units in total). Over the period 2007-2009 492 individuals had their competences recognised in this way, the majority within the certified trades.

In recent years in Flanders, awareness has grown that the different practices of recognition of prior learning in the different domains (in education, at work, etc.) should be integrated in one framework. The Flexible Learning Pathways Act (Flexibiliseringsdecreet), adopted by the Flemish Parliament in 2004, allowed higher education institutions to recognise prior learning – formal and informal – and students’ prior qualifications. It also abolished the notion of study years and based the learning paths of students on earned credits (Kirsch, 2010). There are remarkable efforts to promote recognition of prior learning, through the work done by VDAB and Syntra Flanders on one hand – that adjust the training to the profile of the people - and through the introduction of the qualifications framework and assessment centres on the other. One of AKOV’s objectives is to guarantee transparent and clear certification processes and look after RPL trajectories. The National Qualifications Framework will be used as a reference framework for RPL (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Student transitions to higher education and to the labour market

Many OECD countries report problems with articulation, whereby graduates of shorter postsecondary vocational programmes (typically one to two years) can enter higher level programmes (such as three to four years in university) with the learning outcomes from the lower level programmes being recognised through access to the higher level and course exemptions. Often the problem is a lack of transparency in terms of how different programmes relate to one another. But it may also reflect inadequate incentives for higher level institutions to offer course exemptions. The effect can be multiple inefficiencies: for the students because they have to repeat course material, for funding bodies that pay for such repetition and for institutions that often have to laboriously negotiate articulation agreements on a programme by programme and institution by institution basis. As an illustration of complexity and costs, in the state of Washington in the United States, there are about 6,000 registered bilateral articulation agreements between postsecondary institutions (Kuczer and Field, 2013). These challenges have been an issue in a range of OECD countries reviewed in the course of the Skills beyond School exercise including Austria, Canada, Germany, Israel and the United States (see Box 4).
Box 4 International experience of credit transfer and articulation

In Austria, graduates of vocational colleges can, in principle, start a bachelor’s degree in a relevant study programme in the second or third semester, but the level of recognition depends on individual agreements between institutions and is sometimes absent. In response, many vocational colleges have developed partnerships with academic postsecondary institutions outside Austria, allowing their graduates to earn a professional bachelor’s degree within around one year, a much swifter route than any available in Austria (Musset et al., 2013).

In Canada, articulation policies vary from a systematic, province-wide credit transfer process in British Columbia to credit transfer negotiated bilaterally by institutions in Ontario (Junor, Usher and Beach, 2008).

In Germany, postsecondary CTE institutions (Fachschule) follow standards set up by provincial authorities (Land). This ensures comparability of programmes at the provincial level and allows students to transfer across postsecondary CTE institutions. But transition from postsecondary CTE to academic institutions remains a substantial challenge (Fazekas and Field, 2013a).

In Flanders, student transitions from associate to bachelor degrees – in particular professional bachelor degrees – seem relatively smooth, especially compared to other countries where students from vocational programmes may face many barriers to enter university. Programmes in associate degrees are built to fit in professional bachelors programmes, allowing exemptions for modules common to both programmes. Transitions from postsecondary vocational programmes to employment are also smooth: in 2009, less than 7% of professional bachelor graduates were unemployed one year after graduation, half the level of those from academic bachelors programmes – see Table 3 (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).

Table 3 Graduates unemployed one year after completion, or who have not gained any work experience in that period

By level of education—2009 and 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of unemployed leavers</td>
<td>% without any work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary education</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship (SYNTRA)</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time vocational secondary education</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General secondary education of the 2nd degree</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional education of the 2nd degree</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical secondary education of the 2nd degree</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic secondary education of the 2nd degree</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General secondary education of the 3rd degree</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional education of the 3rd and 4th degree</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical secondary education of the 3rd degree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic secondary education of the 3rd degree</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional bachelor</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic bachelor</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But dropout rates in professional bachelors programmes for those who come from vocational secondary education tracks are high: less than 20% of the students from BSO (vocational upper secondary track) entering professional bachelors programmes in 2003/04 completed their study (see Table 4).

**Table 4 Dropout rate in professional bachelor degree programmes**

For the cohort that started studying in 2003-2004, based on the upper secondary track followed by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary education track</th>
<th>N° of students entering professional bachelors in the school year 2003/04</th>
<th>% of students that graduated during the school year 2005/06</th>
<th>% of students that graduated during the school year 2006/07</th>
<th>% of students that graduated during the school year 2007/08</th>
<th>Completion rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KSO</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSO</td>
<td>11119</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASO</td>
<td>6996</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSO</td>
<td>1297</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20607</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This could suggest that vocational programmes may not be sufficiently well articulated with professional bachelors programmes and/or that these students have had insufficient academic preparation and therefore may be particularly at-risk of dropping out (see Musset et al., 2013 for an analysis of this issue in the Austrian context).

**Challenges**

In Flanders a set of challenges were identified, where the OECD also has relevant international experience and evidence. These are as follows:

**Involvement of the social partners**

Across OECD countries, the engagement of social partners – both employers and unions - is necessary to ensure that the organisation and content of vocational programmes meet the needs of employers, the wider economy and students. At the national level social partner engagement in policy development is essential if policy is to be successfully implemented.
But, in many countries it is hard to engage employers, unions, and professional associations in the vocational education and training system. This is particularly true in countries without strong apprenticeship traditions (OECD, 2010). Organised social partnerships and strong apprenticeship systems often support high levels of engagement. At postsecondary level, additional challenges emerge because postsecondary institutions often have high levels of autonomy, and missions may leave local employer requirements somewhat marginal.

**Box 5 An innovative regional approach**

In 2003 Lower Austria initiated an anticipatory approach (the Netzwerkstatt) in order to better match the structure of vocational education and training to regional labour market development.

The Netzwerkstatt has been set up with the following objectives:

- Develop a qualitative mechanism to anticipate skill needs alongside forecasts.
- Create a regional think tank of actors from employment innovation systems.
- Analyse relevant issues in a framework combining research and practice.
- Provide feedback to the Fachhochschulen and the regional education and training system.

Workshops are organised twice a year on selected topics. Around 60 regional actors with two-thirds coming from strategic enterprises from different sectors and sizes representing about 5% of employees of the region have been participating in the workshops. In 2011, the workshop was conducted for the first time in collaboration with the Economic Chamber of Lower Austria and the Industrial Association of Lower Austria.


Countries use different mechanisms to determine the mix of vocational provision – for example the right numerical balance between training places for chefs and training places for IT professionals. (See Box 5 for one example of such an approach.) While student preferences are very important in determining the mix, some reflection of labour market requirements is also desirable, particularly when provision is publicly subsidised. These wider requirements may be different from those of students, because
students may choose programmes which are intrinsically enjoyable to study, or lead to attractive professions with high status, rather than because they provide the kind of skills which are most needed on the labour market and might therefore drive economic growth. Students’ own preferences may also not adequately respond to skill needs (and to signals such as high wages in shortage areas) in the labour market, as students are often inadequately informed.

In Flanders, while the involvement of social partners is strong in the case of VDAB and SYNTRA and in the definition of the qualifications through AKOV,¹⁴ it is less strong in some other parts of the system, in particular in centres for adult education. There are informal exchanges with social partners (at the national level at the Ministry of Education for example, and at the regional level through the consortia), but their participation is not systematic, and communication flows between the institutions and employers may often be patchy, especially at the local level. A steering board revises the programmes offered by the centres for adult education, under the remit of the Ministry of Education and Training and the Flemish Educational Council based on educational criteria, but employers play a limited role in determining the number of training places in each programme (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013). Regional consortia can play a role in engaging local employers, but to a varying extent. Consequently, some programmes may not be sufficiently informed by the needs of the labour market and centres for adult education may have a bias towards existing or cheaper programmes.

**Sustaining employer involvement**

Across OECD countries, one of the main challenges is to ensure that training meets the needs of the labour market. This means that institutional mechanisms should be in place so that the changing needs of the labour market can be reflected in training systems. Employers are clearly in a strong position to see if the mix of competences and the content of qualifications and curricula meet current labour market needs. Employers alongside other labour market stakeholders need to guide the adaptation of qualifications to emerging requirements.

In Switzerland, for example, the qualifications offered in postsecondary VET are largely determined by labour market associations, with employer and professional organisations defining the content of professional examinations as well as professional college degree programmes. The professional profiles which underpin examinations are regularly reviewed in order to ensure that they remain relevant. The review typically takes between 6 to 12 months, a relatively swift and un-bureaucratic process (Fazekas and Field, 2013b).
While employers have a proper and very important role in articulating the skills needs of the labour market, they also have some significant limitations. They will naturally have an interest in filling specific skills requirements, but may sometimes have less interest in equipping their employees with more transferable skills, as such skills may bid up wages and increase job turnover. To some extent this depends on the level at which their interests are articulated. Employers as a whole have a very strong interest in general transferable skills, including literacy, numeracy and soft skills, while individual employers and sectoral groupings often have narrower interests (OECD, 2010).

In Flanders the qualifications framework is currently being developed in dialogue with the social partners, and it will aim to ensure that the programmes match labour market needs: all associate degree and bachelor degree programmes will have to be linked to a qualification, and therefore to a competence profile, developed by the social partners. This measure is welcome, as it can ensure that the content of each programme is relevant to the needs of the labour market. However the involvement of employers in the content and organisation of programmes needs to be sustained at a local level, for example through the existing cooperation structures such as the consortia and the Regional Technological Centres. The contrary may represent a challenge in ensuring that job competences profiles remain in line with developments in industry and in the labour market.

Variable use of workplace training

In OECD countries the evidence shows that workplace learning plays an essential role in high quality vocational programmes. It is a powerful tool for developing both hard and soft skills, for transitioning students into employment, engaging employers and linking the mix of provision to employer needs. At the same time it is too often neglected, partly because education and training organisations find it easier to work on their own without having to involve employers, and partly because employers do not recognise the potential returns from offering work placements to students. Evidence from a number of countries suggests that making work-based learning a mandatory element of vocational programmes is feasible and has multiple benefits (see Box 6).
Box 6 The principle of mandatory work-based learning

Many institutions tend to operate in silos, and education and training institutions are no exception. Reaching out to employers means breaking out of these silos. It also means overcoming a natural resistance on the part of classroom teachers to the idea that students can learn much in the workplace that they cannot learn so readily in the classroom. So institutions naturally need strong incentives to establish partnerships with employers to facilitate an effective workplace learning element in programmes. Employers also need incentives. Sometimes employers believe (often wrongly) that offering work placements is an unnecessary cost, that they can reasonably avoid, while still benefiting by recruiting from the graduates of a vocational programme.

Against this background, making work placements mandatory can operate as a game-changer. It means that programmes will only be funded when training institutions develop and maintain the active partnerships that support work placements. Under these conditions training providers will see employer partnerships as central to their mission, while employers will see that, unless they are willing to offer work placements, the programme from which they draw their recruits may close or contract, and the government funding shift to another sector, or another region. Many currently reluctant employers will choose to offer work placements under these conditions, assuming that they value the training programmes. Potentially it also means that some programmes that are of so little interest to employers that they will not offer placements may have to consider reducing training places, or even close. This gives employers a desirable influence over the mix of training provision, allied with the principle that the greatest influence goes to those employers that are prepared to contribute most, by way of the offer of work placements.
Box 6 The principle of mandatory work-based learning (continued)

A number of countries, such as Spain, Romania and Denmark, and more recently Sweden, have effectively transitioned their postsecondary VET systems to ones involving mandatory workplace training. In Spain, in both upper secondary and postsecondary programmes, workplace training normally takes place through a compulsory three-month module at the end of the programmes (Field, Kis and Kuczera, 2012). In Sweden, all two-year higher (postsecondary) vocational programmes have a considerable amount of work-based learning (at least 25% of total programme hours), usually in several blocks. This mandatory work-based component of all programmes allows good co-operation between education providers and employers. The work-based components are designed so that students apply concepts learned in the study programme at the workplace, with specific attention given to the links between theory and practice. The education provider is responsible for quality assurance of the selected workplace programme and many education providers choose to appoint a placement co-ordinator to facilitate the process (Ministry of Education and Research Sweden, 2013). In Denmark, work placement has been mandatory in all programmes since August 2009, to ensure that all programmes are professionally oriented and of relevance for the employers and thus the students. All “academy” postsecondary two-year programmes include three months of workplace training and all “professional bachelors” programmes, include at least six months workplace training (Field et. al., 2012).


In Flanders, VET programmes make variable use of workplace training. Work-based learning is used systematically in VDAB programmes, and some form of workplace training is mandatory in associate degrees, and a number of recent initiatives by the ministries of education and work seek its development, but it seems relatively lacking elsewhere. In programmes in centres for adult education, there is no formal requirement for work-based learning, and while it seems to be quite common in some programmes, it is often voluntary for students.

In Flanders, there is a multitude of different legal arrangements for workplace training. There is a great diversity in types of “salaries”, in types of contract and in the legal basis. Some of the legal arrangements are based on federal Belgian law, some on Flemish legislation, which will make the whole structure difficult to understand for employers, students and also individual institutions (Flemish Department of Education and Training,
Quality assurance mechanisms are discretionary and depend on the approach of individual institutions. Also supervisors in the workplace may lack adequate sufficient preparation to guide students within the workplace. Box 7 describes the quality assurance arrangements for workplace training that apply in Denmark.

### Box 7 Quality assurance in workplace training in Denmark

Quality assurance mechanisms for workplace training in postsecondary programmes have three key features:

- The quality assurance process is built into the work placement arrangements: these are a decisive factor for the accreditation of new programmes by the Danish Evaluation Institute.

- Attention is given to making these placements as useful as possible for both VET programmes and employers and the analysis of those links forms part of the accreditation process by the Danish Evaluation Institute.

- The work placement arrangements are designed to be closely linked to learning outcomes. Subsequent to their placement, students report back to their institutions and they are assessed to see if they have met their learning objectives. To ensure this, each student has a teacher or a supervisor for guidance.


In order to support schools and enterprises and to help them understand federal legislation within the Flemish educational context, guidelines were published on the organisation of work-based learning in secondary education (full-time), adult education (secondary level education), special needs secondary education and higher education (see Vlaamse Overheid, 2008, for the guidelines).

*Insufficient data*

Across OECD countries, information underpins the link between vocational education and training and the labour market. Knowledge of job prospects allows students to make informed choices about training programmes, and policy makers to see whether graduates are obtaining relevant work; clear information about learning outcomes helps employers to understand what qualified recruits have learnt. Better data can be
provided either through one-off surveys of those leaving vocational programmes (see Box 8), or by tracking cohorts of individuals through vocational programmes into employment.

### Box 8 Destinations surveys

In **Australia** the Student Outcomes Survey is conducted annually among students who completed some vocational training. Conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research since 1997, it is funded by the Australian Government and provides information on the employment and further study outcomes, the relevance and benefits of training, and student satisfaction. The information collected supports the administration, planning and evaluation of the VET system.

In **Ireland**, the School Leavers Survey is based on a national sample of school leavers, contacted 12 to 18 months after leaving school. Face-to-face interviews, used in this survey since its beginning in 1980, have become more difficult as a result of declining response rates and high costs. Therefore the 2007 School Leavers Survey used a mix of approaches. The selected individuals were asked to complete an online questionnaire and could also ask for a paper copy. Participants were offered an incentive to complete the questionnaire, with their names being entered in a draw for prizes. Those who were particularly difficult to reach (e.g. early school leavers) were followed up by telephone initially and then face-to-face.


The development of policy depends not only on good data, but also on the analytic and research capacity to make use of data and conduct evaluations of policy and policy reform. As a means of addressing this issue, many countries have created dedicated research centres, whose function is to conduct analysis on VET issues. Thus, Australia has developed the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Germany has the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB, *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung*), and Korea the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET). For students, career guidance services that are well-informed about labour market returns (in particular wage returns which will be higher in areas of skills shortage) help students make the right decisions, and help to reduce the discrepancies in the supply and demand of workers by field of study. When career guidance services are not available, students rely on informal sources, such as family and friends, and they may lack reliability and impartiality, and reinforce social disadvantage.
In Flanders, there are insufficient data, which makes it difficult to inform the system and to assess the size of the postsecondary VET sector. Data on labour market outcomes are particularly weak – in relation to different vocational programmes and student transitions. In particular no data are collected concerning the labour market outcomes of programmes delivered in centres for adult education, including associate degrees. Due to a lack of data it is difficult to assess the full extent to which students participated in work placements as part of their course work.

More data would also allow policy makers and stakeholders to make better informed decisions about the future of the system, and help students make better career decisions. In the United States for example, student labour market outcomes are often available by institutions, to help inform student preferences. In England the UKCES is developing a new open access labour market tool which will allow anyone to explore the characteristics of the labour market.

**Teachers and trainers**

Across OECD countries, the quality of the teaching and training profession is as critical in vocational programmes as it is in general education (OECD, 2010). Often there are challenges in meeting the demanding twin requirements which fall on teachers of professional skills of pedagogical skills, and practical professional knowledge and experience. While most countries require vocational teachers to have pedagogical preparation, and usually practical experience in their specialism, keeping abreast of developments in workplace technology and working practices is often more difficult. This issue is typically addressed in two ways. First, part-time working arrangements, with practitioners continuing to work in their field while also working as vocational teachers, has obvious advantages. Second, directly recruiting practitioners from industry in mid-career is useful. Both strategies require a suitably flexible framework of pedagogical preparation suitable to persons in this position (rather than one merely adapted to younger entrants to the profession). Box 9 describes the Swiss case.
Box 9 The preparation of postsecondary vocational teachers in Switzerland

Teachers and trainers in postsecondary professional colleges are well-prepared both in their profession and pedagogically. The Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, SFIVET (Eidgenössisches Hochschulinstitut für Berufsbildung, EHB) provides basic and continuing training to examiners and college teachers. They are required to have a professional college degree, or a higher education degree or an equivalent qualification in their chosen field. Both full and part-time teachers are required to pursue a specialised programme in vocational pedagogy, covering the skills required to convey practical skills rather than academic knowledge. The supply of well-trained teachers and trainers is underpinned by the high prestige of teaching in a professional college and flexible arrangements to blend work in the profession with teaching. Such part-time teaching arrangements not only allow teachers to keep their job in industry, but also ensure that professional colleges’ curricula reflect up-to-date industry requirements.


Allowing skilled workers to acquire their pedagogical competences in a flexible way (e.g. distance learning, recognition of prior learning) helps to encourage them to practice as vocational teachers/trainers. In Ireland, for example, trainers working in the National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) may obtain the required pedagogical qualification by attending one or two-day workshops (OECD, 2010). In Korea, vocational teachers in vocational high schools have strong academic and pedagogical preparation, but often lack practical work experience in their field. The OECD review recommended encouraging newly-recruited VET teachers to have relevant prior work experience, and requiring all vocational institutions to ensure that VET teachers regularly update their skills in the vocational area, including their knowledge of technologies and working practices (Kuczera, Kis and Wurzburg, 2009).

In Flanders requirements to enter the teaching profession in centres for adult education (in terms of initial teacher education) emphasise academic qualifications for those teaching vocational subjects, rather than industry knowledge. Teachers in centres for adult education must have a bachelor or a master degree. 17

This represents a challenge for several reasons: first, the formal requirements (in terms of pedagogical credentials) may create obstacles to
the recruitment of those with experience in the workplace. Second, pedagogical and academic credentials alone may not reflect the particular needs of those teaching vocational subjects, rather than academic ones, and it may prevent people with valuable industry experience from entering teaching. There have been efforts in Flanders to develop “apprenticeships” for teachers – programmes in which teachers spend a period of time in industry. The OECD would encourage this approach. Participation in such skills upgrading opportunities may be encouraged by offering release time from teaching to teachers and substitute teachers to institutions.

Notes

1. In all the six countries presented, postsecondary VET graduates are also less often employed in these occupations than those with tertiary academic studies. Such level of aggregated data is not available for the different communities forming Belgium.
2. Full-time education is compulsory until the age of 16, except that those who have completed the first stage of secondary education may opt for part-time education at the age of 15.
3. This certificate of a specialised professional qualification is additional to the general certificate of secondary education.
4. The nursing programme, which is now being organised by schools for secondary education, was until 2009 part of the fourth degree of secondary vocational education (BSO). It will now become an associate degree programme, although, as an exception, it will still be organised by schools for secondary education, for historical reasons (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2013).
5. For example vocational programmes in agriculture fall under the responsibility of the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries.
6. A fee of EUR 574 also applies for teacher education programmes.
7. The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.
8. However, schools within one geographical unit, such as a town or village, may be governed by different school boards, which can lead to a costly duplication of structures and a lack of co-operation between schools.

9. Some drawbacks (planning costs for centres, and higher delivery cost) were pointed out initially.

10. The Regional Technological Centres aim to facilitate workplace training and internships, the sharing of equipment and the professional development of teachers and trainers.

11. There are particularly well developed in West Flanders e.g. graduate degree in accounting, collaboration between CC Beveren and CVO Hitek.

12. In April 2012, five professional qualifications had been developed: warehouse employee (Level 2), residential electrician (Level 4), dental assistant (Level 4), dispatcher freight (Level 5), shop manager small and medium sized shop (Level 5).

13. 559 COMPETENT profiles were developed in 2011 and 2012.

14. The contacts between AKOV and the social partners are always official and formal (linked to the NQF).

15. The SONAR longitudinal survey registered the transition from school to work of three cohorts of Flemish youngsters, born in 1976, 1978 and 1980 and interviewed in 1999 and 2003, which is very interesting from an academic research point of view, but does not help inform the system for future developments.

16. The VDAB study on school leavers does not look at associate degree programmes (except 4th grade nursing programmes).

17. The degree does not have to be linked to the subject they teach.
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OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training

A Skills beyond School Commentary on Flanders

Higher level vocational education and training (VET) programmes are facing rapid change and intensifying challenges. What type of training is needed to meet the needs of changing economies? How should the programmes be funded? How should they be linked to academic and university programmes? How can employers and unions be engaged? The country reports in this series look at these and other questions. They form part of Skills beyond School, the OECD policy review of postsecondary vocational education and training.

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Postsecondary and continuing vocational programmes
Previous OECD analysis and recommendations
Strengths and challenges

Further reading

See also www.oecd.org/education/vet.
For more information about OECD work on skills, see skills.oecd.org.