European Commission

Education and Training Monitor 2013

Belgium

Education and Training

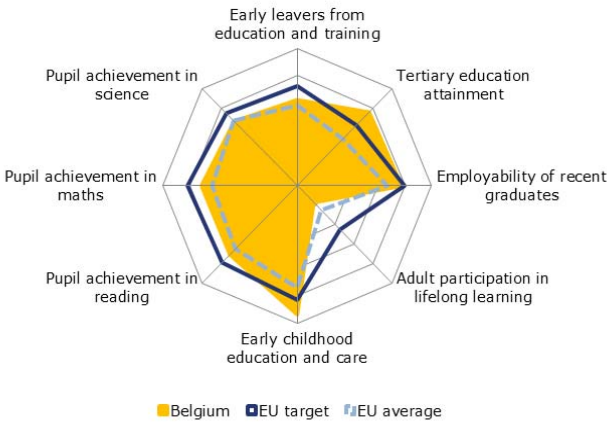
1. Key indicators and benchmarks

Europe 2020 headline targets			Belgium 2009	Belgium 2012	EU average 2009	EU average 2012	Europe 2020 target / Benchmark
1. Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)			11.1%	12.0%	14.2% [EU28]	12.7% [EU28]	**EU target: 10%** National target: 9.5%
2. Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)			42.0%	43.9%	32.1% [EU28]	35.7% [EU28]	**EU target: 40%** National target: 47%
ET 2020 Benchmarks							
3. Early childhood education and care (4 years old - year before start of compulsory primary)			99.3%	98.1% [11]	91.7%	93.2% [11]	**95%**
4. Basic skills Low achievers (15 year-olds; Level 1 or lower in PISA study)	Reading		17.7%	:	19.6%	:	**15%**
	Mathematics		19.1%	:	22.2%	:	**15%**
	Science		18.0%	:	17.7%	:	**15%**
5. Learning mobility	Initial vocational training (IVET)	**a.** Students participating in Leonardo da Vinci programs as a share of vocational students at ISCED 3	0.3%	0.3% [11]	0.6%	0.7% [11]	
	Higher Education	**b.** Erasmus inbound students as % of student population in host country		1.7% [11]		1.1% [11]	
		c. Inbound degree mobile students as % of student population in the host country		8.2% [11]		7.0% [11]	
6. Employment rate of graduates (age 20-34) having left education 1-3 years before reference year			81.0%	80.9%	78.3%	75.7%	**82%**
7. Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)			6.8%	6.6%	9.3%	9.0%	**15%**
Proposed ET 2020 benchmark							
8. Foreign languages skills	**a.** ISCED 2 students at proficiency level B1 or higher in first foreign language[1]		:	30.2% [11]	:	43.5% [11]	
	b. ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		26.3%	26.4% [11]	58.6%	60.8% [10]	
Other ET 2020 Indicators							
9. Investment in education and training	**a.** General government expenditure on education (% of GDP)		6.2%	6.2% [11]	5.5%	5.3% [11]	
	b. Annual expenditure on public and private educational institutions per pupil/student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	€ 6,669 [08]	€ 6,818 [10]	€ 5,732 [08]	€ 6,021 [10]	
		ISCED 3-4	€ 8,219 [08]	€ 8,476 [10]	€ 6,964 [08]	€ 7,123 [10]	
		ISCED 5-6	€ 11,745 [08]	€ 11,691 [10]	€ 9,309 [08]	€ 9,168 [10]	
10. Digital competences	**a.** Pupils in grade 4 (ISCED 1) using computers at school		:	68.8% [11, FL]	60.7% [07]	64.7% [11]	
	b. Individuals aged 16-74 with high computer skills[2]		18.0%	23.0%	25.0%	26.0%	
11. Entrepreneurial competences	Individuals aged 18-64 who believe to have the required skills and knowledge to start a business		37.0%	37.0%	42.3% [a]	42.0% [a]	
12. Vocational education and training	Share of vocational students at ISCED 3		72.8%	72.8% [11]	49.6%	50.3% [11]	
13. Skills for future labour markets Projected change in employment 2010-2020 in %	High qualification		:	15.9%	:	19.1% [EU28]	
	Medium qualification		:	13.9%	:	4.6% [EU28]	
	Low qualification		:	-18.7%	:	-20.2% [EU28]	
14. Low-skilled adults	Literacy		:	14.0% [FL]	:	19.9% [EU17]	
	Numeracy		:	13.4% [FL]	:	23.6% [EU17]	
	Problem solving in technology rich environments[3]		:	25.8% [FL]	:	26.9% [EU13]	

Source: Cedefop: 13 / EAC: 10a,b / European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC): 8a / Eurostat (Government finance statistics): 9a / Eurostat (LFS): 1, 2, 6, 7 / Eurostat (ISS): 10b / Eurostat (UOE): 3, 8b, 9b, 10c, 12 / IEA TIMSS: 10a / Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 11 / OECD (PIAAC): 14 / OECD (PISA): 4

Notes: [07] =2007, [08] =2008, [09] =2009, [10] =2010, [11] =2011, e= estimate, a= unweighted average b= break, p= provisional, FL= Flemish Community
Number of countries included in EU average: PISA=25, Entrepreneurship=18, Language skills=13, ICT/Computers at school=13, others: EU27
[1]= average of skills tested in reading, listening, writing, [2]= having carried out 5-6 specific computer related activities, [3]= Results cover people with scores below level 1 as well as people who have no computer experience or failed the ICT test

Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)



Source: DG EAC calculations on the basis of data from Eurostat (LFS 2012 and UOE 2011) and OECD (PISA 2009). *Note:* all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the chart).

2. Main challenges

Belgium's education system is faced with poor educational achievements of pupils enrolled in VET, a significant educational gap depending on the socio-economic background in particular for migrants pupils, persisting differences in early school leavers rate[1] and basic skills performance between the communities and regions. Belgium is confronted with a skills mismatch in terms of levels and relevance to labour needs, which represents an obstacle in tackling unemployment and in supporting growth. Skills shortages for technical and future-oriented occupations are observed at all levels of education. School leavers in Belgium, in particular the ones without upper secondary education, are faced with more difficult transition to work than in most other OECD countries[2] reflecting both inappropriate skills and limited opportunities.

Whilst there is a need to increase the occupational and interregional mobility as well as the participation rate to the labour market, adult participation in lifelong learning is far below the EU average (6.6% vs. 9% in 2012) notably for the older workers and low-skilled[3] and declined significantly in the last years (8.5% in 2005).

These challenges are reflected in one of the 2013 European Semester country specific recommendations: measures should be taken to reinforce the coherence between labour matching, education, lifelong learning and vocational training policies for older people and youth. Attention should be given to social-inclusion strategies for people with a migrant background.

3. Investing in skills and qualifications

Investing in education and training in a context of economic crisis

With no significant impact of the crisis, public spending on education as a share of GDP in Belgium remains one of the highest in the EU with 0.9 percentage point above the EU average (6.2% vs. 5.3% in 2011). The share of private expenditure on all levels of education in Belgium is one of the lowest among OECD countries (5% vs. 16% on average)[4]. The proportion of annual education expenditure dedicated to human resource costs, close to 85%, ranks amongst the highest in EU[5], far above the 70% EU average. However, during 2011-2012 a considerable increase in capital expenditure[6] is observed for the German-speaking and the Flemish Communities. In 2013, the French-speaking community approved a significant budget to respond to the important needs in capital forecast in the coming years.

Communities are taking measures of different scope to increase the efficiency of spending whilst ensuring quality education for all. A 2009 reform of the funding of Flemish universities introduced performance criteria; there are concerns regarding the right balance between quantitative and qualitative criteria[7]. A 2012 study analysed potential savings in the Flemish education sector[8]. Pressure on smart funding is especially high[9] in the French-

1 2012 early school leavers rate : 12.2% in Belgium, 15.3% and 19.9% in the Walloon and Brussels regions respectively ; source : Eurostat
2 OECD eco review- 15 Jan 2013, Enhancing the inclusivenes of the labour market in Belgium By Jens Høj eco/wkp(2013)1 no 1009
3 Eurostat 2011 Belgium learning participation rate of adults 7.1%, of older workers 3.9% and of low-skilled 3.1%
4 Education at a Glance, 2013, country note on Belgium
5 Funding of Education in Europe. The Impact of the Economic Crisis. Eurydice Report March 2013
6 Funding of Education in Europe. The Impact of the Economic Crisis. Eurydice Report March 2013
7 See: http://www.pascalsmet.be/articles/onderwijs/oproep-academici-een-belangrijk-signaal
8 Carl van Keirsblick(2012) Besparingen in het onderwijs : 3 pijlers, Itinera Institute
9 Public spending on education in the French-speaking Community as a share of GDP is slightly above the national and EU average rates and demographic pressure is high in particular in the Brussels region

speaking Community. Measures have been taken to lower the repetition years. However, the 'differentiated measures' is questioned[10]: it does not address systemic reform but simply provides additional resources to certain schools and the measures seems not sufficiently focused. A 2011 report[11]makes different recommendations for more efficient spending in tertiary education. However, the 2013 bill on the modernisation of the higher education landscape of the French community does not revise the current funding system. Closer synergies between education and training providers are expected to lead to more efficient spending[12].

There are concerns in all communities regarding the financing of the planned reforms which will request appropriate prioritisation, close monitoring and efficient spending.

Skills

In terms of basic skills, 15-year-olds' performance on 2009 PISA test is better than the EU average in reading and mathematics and very close to it for science, with the Flemish, German and French speaking communities PISA results significantly above, close and below the EU average respectively. At national and community levels, the gap between the top and lower achievers is one of the highest of the OECD. Underperformance reflects socio-economic differences and youngsters with migrant background are much more exposed, in particular in Flanders[13]. In general, those youngsters are twice more at risk to be early school leavers. 10 year-olds Flemish pupils ranked amongst the top performers for mathematics and the lowest ones for science in the 2011 TIMSS survey. French speaking community average results of 10 years-olds in Literacy at the 2011 PIRLS remain below the average with modest improvement since 2006.

Belgium is developing and implementing more than one national qualifications framework (NQF). As stated in 2012 by the relevant Belgian Federal Law, the European qualifications framework (EQF) levels will be used as a common reference for the three communities. However, they will reference separately to the EQF[14]. The Flemish qualification framework is now reaching early operational stage. In view of clarifying the placing of professional qualifications, an updated referencing report is planned in 2013. In the French and German speaking communities, NQF preparation is now well advanced. The adoption of the French community's NQF and its referencing to the EQF are expected by the end of 2013.

The use of ICT is key to support flexible and modular learning in all educational pathways in the Flemish community. The 2012 Media Literacy Policy Plan broadens the policy on ICT towards the field of digital media. It includes a 40-point action plan encompassing measures related to teacher education and to the development and use of open educational resources as illustrated by the launch of the educational portal (klascement[15]) for teachers. The Flemish education committee advice on the integration of ICT in compulsory education encourages each school to develop an ICT strategy[16]. Other community and/or regional strategies focus on equipment and training provision for teachers. Teacher's competences need to be further developed in order to introduce innovative pedagogical approaches. Use of a virtual community and open educational resources are part of the key pilot project 'Lift up' (see point 4). The Walloon region cooperates with the communities for some initiatives (Digital school of tomorrow, 2011) or develops specific ones.

4. Tackling early school leaving and raising the bar in school education

In 2012, Belgium was still slightly better than the EU average (12.0% vs. 12.7% in 2012) on early school leaving (ESL) despite no significant improvement and increasing gaps between regions[17]. In 2012, a declining rate was observed in Flanders which is launching a new comprehensive ESL strategy as a result of a 2012 agreement between the Flemish Government and the Social Partners on Professional Careers[18]. Against the EU general trend, ESL rates have been rising again in Wallonia and the Brussels region reaching worrisome levels (15.3% and 19.9% respectively). First steps have been taken in June 2013 towards a comprehensive ESL strategy: 1) an agreement between the many competent governments[19] to develop a register of trajectories of pupils and learners from secondary education to the labour market; 2) two draft project decrees approved by the French community government aiming at a better coordination of education and youth policies.

Among others, Pisa results attest of very different levels of results for schools with similar socio-economic backgrounds

11 Académie Royale de Belgique, Groupe de travail sur le financement de l'enseignement supérieur en Communauté Française, rapport intermédiaire du 15 juillet 2011

12 2012 National Reform Programme.

13 In the 2009 PISA tests, the proportion of low performing students with an immigrant background was nearly three times the proportion of low performing native students. Source: OCDE

14 Cedefop, Analysis and overview of NQF developments in European countries. Annual report 2012

15 The KlasCement initiative was launched in 1998 by a teacher and a group of volunteers, its value has been progressively acknowledged at both community level (the initiative has been under the remit of the Flemish Minister for Education and Training since January 2013) and outside the country. KlasCement has been indeed replicated in the Netherlands into two versions, namely 'klascement.nl' (addressed to Dutch teachers) and 'klascement.eu' (for teachers all around the EU)

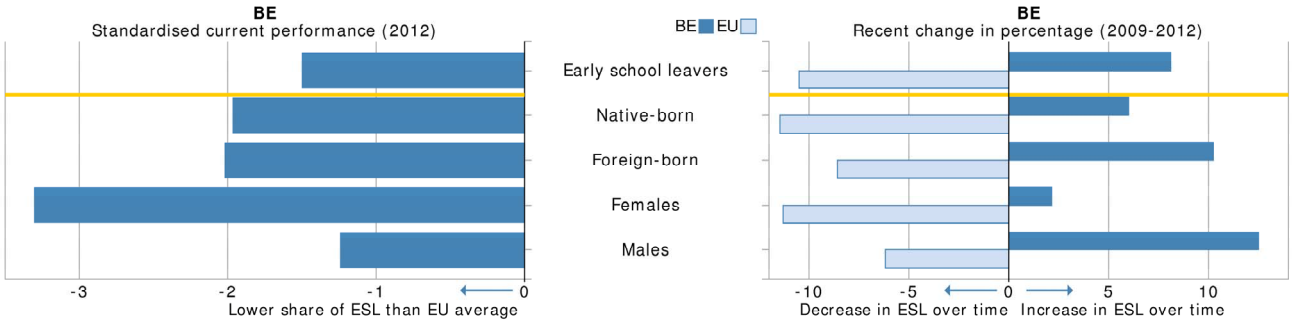
16 VLOR, 'Advies over ICT-integratie in het leerplicht onderwijs', May 2013

17 The Flemish Government has set an addtional ESL target at 5.2 % by 2020

18 Vesoc agreement on Career Policy (17 February 2012)

19 The respective governments of Wallonia, the French and German communities, the Brussels region and the 'CoCOf' .

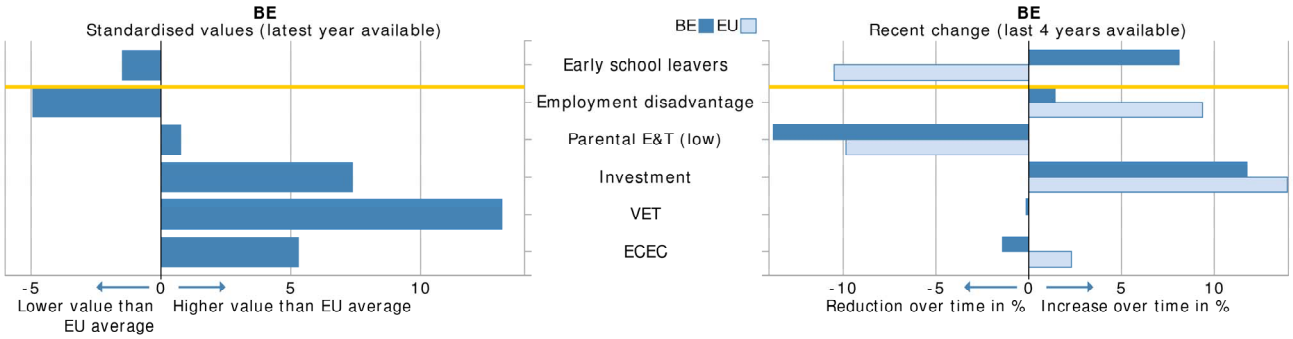
Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training: sub-groups



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* ESL = early school leaving. See Annex 2 for further information.

Participation in early childhood education of 4 year-olds remains amongst the highest in EU. However, participation fell between 2009 and 2011 from close to full coverage to 98.1%. Particularly low participation is observed in the Brussels region. The Flemish community has taken measures to encourage the participation of all children.

Figure 3. Early leavers from education and training: sub-indicators



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* see Annex 2 for an explanation of the sub-indicators.

Unemployment rate amongst early school leavers is 36.3% (compared to 40.1% at EU level) reflecting the fact that youth unemployment rate increased far less than in other countries. However, they are faced with more difficult transition to work than in most other OECD countries[20].

With different approaches and scope, all communities have taken or plan measures to improve school quality and promote equity. The Flemish strategy is based on a so-called "triangle of quality"[21] building on school autonomy, support and (self)-evaluation; the schools, the pedagogical advisory services of the different networks and the Flemish School Inspectorate are the 'corners'. Quality of education in the Brussels region is raising particular concern and an inspection of all schools is planned during the next academic year. The Literacy Plan 2012-2016 (Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid) encompasses measures for groups at risk in secondary education. Good mastering of Dutch is seen as a transversal objective. Starting from the 2010-11 scholastic year the French community has launched projects aimed at reducing the high number of repetition years, namely the 'Lift up! (Décolâge!) project[22] for children aged 2,5 to 8 years, and to implement a learning outcome approach at secondary level. Projects have also been launched by civil society. Room for improvement has been identified as regards use of evidence to support policy, the definition of learning outcomes with clear levels of attainment, support for teachers to implement the competence based approach, earlier intervention for groups at risk and tools helping schools to evaluate their educational outcomes and barriers and share good practices. There is no evidence of results of a key measure taken aiming at improving quality and equity in access to schools ('décret inscriptions'). In addition, all communities have taken measures to improve the quality and relevance of VET education which should contribute to lower the drop-out rate.

Belgium is among the three European countries which are the most affected by a shortage of qualified teachers[23]. The situation is more acute in the French community where a shortage is observed at all ISCED levels whilst the situation in the Flemish community is about the average observed in Europe though with a lack of teachers in mathematics[24]; communities are engaged in discussion encouraging inter-professional mobility. In

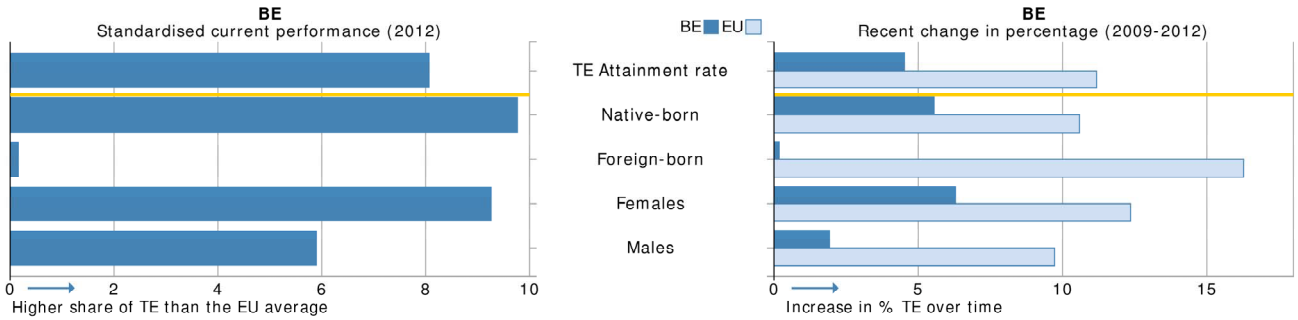
20 OECD eco review- 15 Jan 2013, Enhancing the inclusivenes of the labour market in Belgium By Jens Høj eco/wkp(2013)1 no 1009
21 OECD : Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education (2013, link http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/oecd/belgium.html,
22 250 schools participate to the 'Lift up ' project for the 2013-14 academic year
23 Progress towards the common European objectives in education and training (2011),European Commission staff working document
24 Study on Policy Measures to Improve the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession in Europe , April 2013,Contract n° EAC-2010-1391 Final Report Volume 2, European Commission

the last few years, the Flemish community has taken different measures to modernise the teaching profession[25]. Current discussions aim at improving the working conditions of beginning teachers in order to retain them, and more recently, at revising the initial teacher education. At this stage, the option of a 5 years master does not seen appropriate. Early 2012, the French community approved an orientation note to reform initial teacher education. Consultation[26] is ongoing and implementation is planned by 2014-5. The extension of the length of study to five years for all teachers is of note. Whilst the French community is badly hit by a shortage of qualified teachers, the number of candidates wishing to join the profession exceeds the available number of places. A recent survey[27] highlights difficulties in retaining them due to a (too) large difference in position on the labour market and status between beginning teachers and established teachers. The early leaving rate during the first year of teaching accounts for more than 50% of the early leaving rate of the first 5 years of teaching[28]. Without denying the need of improved guidance and support to beginning teachers, the survey suggests that high policy attention should be given to this sensitive issue of status. The German speaking Community focuses on better teacher education and a professionalisation of school management.

5. Encouraging participation in tertiary education and modernising higher education

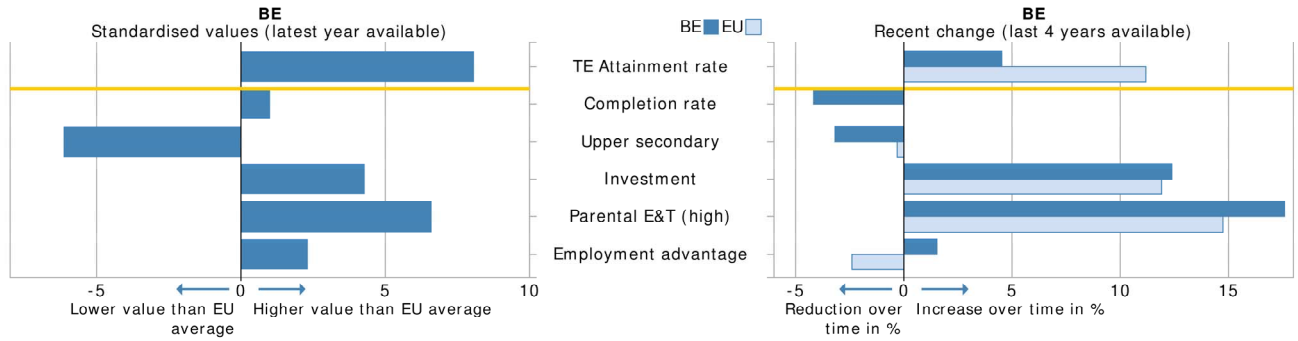
Belgium's tertiary attainment rate significantly exceeds the EU average (43.9% vs. 35.7 % in 2012). The national target has been set at 47 % in 2020. The parent's level of education has a larger than EU average influence on the participation in tertiary education. All communities have taken measures with mixed results as regards widening participation to under-represented groups and lowering the high drop-out rates. New measures are explored (e.g. introduction of evaluation test). Meeting the twin challenge of quality education and massification is a raising concern for universities. A recent survey[29] urges for more attention to quality criteria and less focus on quantitative ones. A profound reform of the Flemish higher education system, with integration of the academic courses in colleges into universities, will be implemented in one phase during the 2013-2014 academic year[30]. Further measures focus on quality assurance and accreditation. The 2013 draft decree on Higher Education modernisation of the French community aims to improve student achievement rates by more informed choice and better support of the students (e.g. informative evaluation test) and to rationalise the offer of training. The draft decree however does not provide indication on quality/performance criteria.

Figure 4. Tertiary education attainment: sub-groups



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* TE = tertiary education. See Annex 2 for further information.

Figure 5. Tertiary education attainment: sub-indicators



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* see Annex 2 for an explanation of the sub-indicators.

25 Reform of the initial education of teachers, introduction of performance criteria in the selection and career path, increased support for teachers, European Commission (2013), Study on Policy Measures to Improve the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession, vol2

26 The consultation will focus on three areas: strengthening teacher education, redefining the learning content and the reorganization of the structure formation

27 B.Delvaux, P. Desmarez,V. Dupriez,S. Lothaire,M. Veinstein (2013), Les enseigants débutants en Belgique francophone. Les cahiers du Girsef

28 The average early leaving rate during the first 5 years is estimated at 35,6% on average for the all education and training system

29 Itinera Institute, 'the price of massification',2013/15, 2 October 2013

30 Integration decree, 5 July 2012

All communities are committed to promote outgoing/incoming study and placement mobility inside and outside Europe, including also teacher, staff and researcher mobility. The Flemish community has set a target of 20% graduate students being mobile by 2020.

6. Facilitating the transition from education to work

At 80.9% in 2013, the employment rate of recent graduates remains above the EU average (75.7%). Whilst youth unemployment rate increased far less than in most European countries, school leavers in Belgium, in particular the low-qualified, face a difficult transition to work [31] reflecting inappropriate skills. Moreover, since the start of the economic crisis, the share of low qualified youngsters not in employment, education and training has risen to 18%, above the 16% OECD average. The situation of the low-qualified will become worse in the future as the demand for medium and high qualified jobs up to 2020 is forecast to increase, in particular for the former. In Belgium, private returns for young people qualifying from VET post-secondary education, estimated in terms of earning differentials, do not differ significantly from the ones investing in tertiary education.

There are different plans to monitor the pupils' trajectories and the transition from education to the labour market. Initiatives have been taken at federal and regional levels to secure an increasing number of work integration traineeship places with a focus on the low qualified school leavers and to launch the Youth guarantee by 2014[32]. In addition, communities have taken a wide variety of measures to improve guidance on career opportunities, developing alternate training and traineeships at higher education level, and in the Flemish community by the introduction in 2009 of short post-secondary curriculum[33].

Moreover, all communities have taken measures to improve the quality, relevance and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET). Participation in VET is high with 72.8% of students enrolled in upper secondary vocational education and training in 2012. However, pupils enrolled in VET qualification sections and apprenticeships are faced with a high level of repetition years and are more at risk of leaving without qualification. Early June 2013, the Flemish Government has reached an agreement on an orientation note aiming at a profound reform of secondary education. The agreement foresees a 'broad' common first 2 years degree allowing for later orientation towards VET and general education streams. Provisions to include both weak and strong performers are foreseen. The split between general, technical, vocational and artistic education in upper secondary education would be replaced by a specialisation according to 5 fields. A final decision is to be taken by 2016. To reduce the level of repetition years and drop-outs, the French speaking community has launched the "Qualification by units" - CPU34 project accompanied with the introduction of learning outcomes. A unique apprenticeship contract will be introduced in 2013.

The 2012 VESOC agreement between the Flemish Government and the Social Partners on Professional Careers foresees actions related to transition from education to the labour market. The French Wallonia-Brussels parliament has started to discuss in August 2013 the project for a third economic 'Marshall Plan' (referred as MP '2022'); consultation of the social partners has been launched. Compared to the previous plans, a major change is the central role given to education and training and the need to increase the link with the world of work.

7. Upgrading skills through lifelong learning

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC[35]) shows that adults (aged 16-65) in Belgium (Flanders) score significantly above the EU average in the proficiency tests on literacy and numeracy. Moreover, the share of low-skilled adults is rather low: 14% in literacy and 13% in numeracy (compared to 19% and 24% respectively at EU level).

The gap in proficiency skills for literacy between the generations aged 25-34 and 55-65 is significant (i.e. equivalent to the skills usually acquired with about 5 years of education). This might be due to improvements in the education system in recent decades and / or a decline in skills over the working life.

In addition, there is a big difference between the skills levels of native and foreign born. There are however rather small differences in young adults' (aged 16-29) scores in literacy and numeracy across different education levels, in particular between lower and upper secondary education.

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31 OECD eco review- 15 Jan 2013, Enhancing the inclusivenes of the labour market in Belgium By Jens Høj eco/wkp(2013)1 no 1009

32 From October 2013, the Brussels region has set-up a specific "Youth Guarantee" service whose first task will be to implement the federal measure related to integration work traineeships

33 "Se-n-se" and short cycle HE vocationally-oriented study programmes (HBO5), Decree on Higher vocational education of April 2009. Evaluation planned in 2013

34 Initiated in 2010-11, the pilot project "Qualification by units- CPU" concerns the last two years of compulsory education and should be achieved in 2012-13. It introduces the concept of certification by units. The pilot concerns 5 secteurs : training programmes consist in different units with corresponding learning outcomes. It is a response to the Ecvet approach.

35 Volume I of the Education and Training Monitor (chapter 6) provides an overview of the results of the survey. Skills levels are presented either in terms of average score points or proportion of adults at a given proficiency level in literacy or numeracy (level 1 to 5) or problem solving in technology-rich (ICT) environments (level 1 to 3 or no ICT experience).

Despite the fact that different measures have been taken at federal and regional levels, the adult participation rate in lifelong learning is well below the EU average (6.6% vs. 9% in 2012), notably for older workers (3.5%) and the low-skilled (2.7%)[36], and declined continuously over the last few years.

Nevertheless, employees have, in comparison to the EU average, in principle good access to enterprise-provided continuing training, because in 2010, 78% of enterprises provided such vocational training (EU: 66%). Better synergies between the main training providers are progressing in the regions and initiatives are taken to secure the quality of the provision of training. The French–speaking community, Wallonia and the Brussels region have launched in February the '2013 – the year of competences'. The objective is to prepare, with all training providers, a more profound reorganisation of the post-2014 period LLL approaches and governance mode in view of the transfer of responsibilities established by the last state reform.

[36] Source : Eurostat 2012