

REPORT

JULY 2011

Referencing of the **Flemisch Qualifications Framework**
to the **European Qualifications Framework**



GOVERNMENT OF FLANDERS

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PART ONE:

THE FLEMISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the Flemish qualifications framework was approved by the Flemish parliament as part of the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure of 30th April 2009. The framework describes eight levels of qualifications, obtained through formal, informal or non-formal learning. The Flemish qualifications framework aims at clarifying qualifications and the way they are related to each other and to optimize the communication about qualifications, specifically between the educational area and the professional area. The development of a Flemish qualifications framework is an initiative in line with a global strategy of the Flemish Government to become one of the top 5 regions in Europe by 2020 (“Vlaanderen in Actie”). Lifelong learning is one of the key areas that have been identified to reach this objective.

This report describes the current situation (April 2011) with regard to the Flemish qualifications framework. Globally this means that the Flemish qualifications framework exists and is approved, but that it has not been applied in practice so far. Discussions to elaborate the implementation decrees have started a while ago, but have not led to any concrete proposals yet due to a number of remaining issues that need further clarification and consensus. Although the legal framework for implementation is not in place today, some initiatives have started to prepare the actual implementation of the framework. Therefore, this report has to be considered as an evolving document that will be regularly updated to remain consistent with the actual situation in Flanders.

“ This report has to be considered as an evolving document that will be regularly updated to remain consistent with the actual situation in Flanders. This version describes the Flemish situation until April 2011. ”

As indicated above, this version describes the Flemish situation until April 2011.

The Flemish framework was preceded by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The European qualifications framework is considered a meta-framework as it is a common reference for the European member states. By aligning the national qualifications frameworks to the European framework, qualifications will become more transparent, comprehensive and comparable within Europe. It is essential for Europe’s competitive position and social cohesion to permanently renew the knowledge, skills and competences of the citizens and to exchange it. Lifelong learning and mobility of students and employees between different countries are stimulated by using structured and shared concepts of learning outcomes.

To allow the European qualifications framework to function as a meta-framework, the European Parliament recommended the member states to align their national framework to the European qualifications framework by 2010. By 2012 all new qualifications should include a reference to the appropriate EQF level. To support this process, the European Union suggested to designate a national coordination point. In Flanders the Agency for quality assurance in education and training (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming – AKOV) was established in 2009 and appointed as the national coordination

point for the European qualifications framework. One of the assignments of the agency is therefore to realize the referencing of the Flemish qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework.

The purpose of this report is to describe to which extent the Flemish qualifications framework, as approved by the parliament, is aligned to the European Qualifications Framework. The report consists of four parts:

- The first part illustrates the Flemish qualifications framework. Chapter I.1 gives an overview on how the Flemish situation was triggered by the European context. Chapter I.2 explains the structure and characteristics of the Flemish education and training system. Chapter I.3 focuses on the Flemish qualifications framework.
- In part two the actual referencing exercise is elaborated. This referencing process is structured by the use of the 10 criteria, as developed and agreed by the EQF advisory group.
- The third part describes the stakeholder consultation process and gives an overview of the received stakeholder feedback on the referencing process.
- In the fourth and last part the final conclusions of the referencing process are drawn.

PART ONE: THE FLEMISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

I.1 Triggered by evolutions at European level

I.1.1 The European context

Although education policies are the responsibility of member states, the European Union supports them by taking initiatives to optimise cooperation, mobility and transparency between the different states. Aligned with this vision the European Union started to develop a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2004 as a result of the European policy in line with the Lisbon Strategy and the Copenhagen Process.

In March 2000 the European Council formulated ambitious objectives for the European Union during a special meeting in Lisbon. Because of the developments in the economy and society, such as globalisation, the European Union had to adapt its strategy. The council agreed to aim at “becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

One of the key components for a well-functioning knowledge-based economy is a modern educational system. Therefore the Lisbon European Council set the objective for education and training in the European Union to increase transparency of qualifications in order to adapt to the demands of the knowledge society, by stimulating lifelong learning and making mobility between the different member states more feasible for students as well as for employees.

As from the year 2000 the European Council meets every spring to follow progress of the Lisbon strategy and to set more concrete targets. Several initiatives concerning education and training were taken under the name ‘Education & training 2010’ as from 2004, which is recently replaced by a new version, ‘Education and training 2020’.

Another crucial and integral part to execute the Lisbon strategy is the development of an enhanced European cooperation of high quality vocational education and training, notably in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness. In November 2002 this need was discussed, with the Copenhagen Declaration as result. In line with the renewed Lisbon strategy and the Copenhagen Process a major step forward was taken for vocational education and training in May 2009 with the development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF, nowadays: EQAVET) and European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

Parallel with the initiatives as described above, the European area of higher education (EHEA) was established in 2010. This was the result of the Bologna Declaration signed

by 29 European countries in 1999, but now covering 47 countries. In this declaration the signatories engaged in the creation of a highly qualitative, attractive and competitive European higher educational system, where transparency and recognition of programmes make students more mobile and employable within the different European countries. More concretely, the participants decided to:

- create a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- create a system of credits such as ECTS
- agree on adopting a system of two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate), which has been modified into a three-cycle system (bachelor – master – doctoral degree) later on.
- promote mobility by overcoming obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff
- promote European co-operation in quality assurance
- promote the necessary European dimensions in higher education.

At this moment 47 countries participate in the EHEA.

The levels of this qualifications framework for Higher Education are compatible with the EQF. However, in contrast with the EHEA, EQF includes all types of education, training and qualifications.

I.1.2 The European Qualifications Framework

The European qualifications framework can be considered as a meta-framework as the participating European countries have already developed or are currently developing their own national qualifications framework, which is expected to be related to the EQF by 2010.

The Aim of the EQF is to connect these NQF's, not to merge or reform them. By 2012 all new qualifications should carry a reference to the appropriate EQF level, while the awarding of these levels will remain a national responsibility.

“

The aim of the EQF is to connect the national qualification frameworks, not to merge or reform them.

”

By relating different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together around a common European reference, it will become easier to compare qualifications from different countries, institutions or activities. This increases the possibility for students as well as employees to move around Europe and helps applicants to describe their skills, knowledge and competences to recruiters in addition to existing European mobility instruments and programmes such as Europass, Erasmus, and ECTS. Furthermore, the EQF stimulates lifelong learning by enclosing all levels of qualifications acquired in general, vocational as well as academic education and training. Individuals with extensive experience from work or other fields of activity are supported by facilitating validation of non-formal and informal learning.

¹ In annex 1 you can find more information about the European Qualifications Framework.

Although this is a voluntary process, 32 countries agreed to cooperate in the creating of this network of independent but mutually understandable qualification systems. Since 2004 a rapid development of national qualifications frameworks occurred, which showed the need of increased transparency and comparability of qualifications at all levels. Also the Flemish stakeholders agreed on the importance of a common qualifications framework. In 2009 the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure was approved.

I.2 The Flemish Educational and Training System

I.2.1 Level of competence

Belgium is a federal union with 3 regions and 3 communities, each with their own parliament and government (only in the case of the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region these happen to be one and the same).

The three Belgian communities are the following: the Flemish community, the French community and the German-speaking community. The constitutional revision dd. 15 July 1988 transferred the responsibilities regarding education and training to the Communities.

In line with their responsibilities regarding education and training, the three Belgian communities can each autonomously decide whether to develop a qualifications framework or not. The Flemish community is currently the only one that has an approved qualifications framework. Both other communities are in the process of developing a framework and follow the Flemish evolutions:

➤ **The French community:**

On 16 September 2010, the Government of the French Community has agreed on the principle of the creation of a French qualifications framework with a double entry, one for educational qualifications and one for the professional qualifications, declined into eight levels and consistent with the descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework. The proposed structure of this framework is similar to the Flemish one. A working group is responsible for preparing the groundwork for a legal text and a draft referencing report for 2011.

➤ **The German-speaking community:**

The German-speaking community is going to develop its own national qualifications framework as well. The German-speaking community will follow the NQF guideline of the other Belgian regions and communities, especially Flanders', but also qualifications frameworks from other countries where the dual vocational training is of higher importance, are of interest. As for all national qualifications frameworks, output orientation will be a crucial aspect, especially due to the close borders of the German-speaking community and the already existent mobility on the education and labour market beyond those borders. A first NQF draft is due to be published for the first half of 2011. It is likely to contain eight levels, according to the criteria of the EQF. Similar to the Flemish model, all competence levels may be achieved not only by the general education but also by professional education. For levels 6 to 8 a coexistence between NQF and Bologna criteria is expected. A discussion with all stakeholders on the first NQF draft and on the following process is scheduled for mid-2011. At the end of 2011 a NQF conference will be held in the German-speaking community to validate the NQF concept and its alignment with formal certificates and degrees. In

² All responsibilities regarding education and training have been transferred, with the exception of the age at which compulsory education starts and ends, the minimum requirements for diploma conferrals and the pension system.

2012 at the latest, the NQF for the German-speaking community will be set by adoption of a decree through its parliament.

I.2.2 General administration of the Flemish educational and training system

To develop and execute the education and training policy in Flanders, the two main policy areas being involved, are: “Education and Training” and “Work and Social Economy”. Whereas Education and Training covers the whole spectrum of types of education and training (including general education, vocational education, etc.), “Work and Social Economy” mainly focuses on vocational training for adults.

The policy area *Education and Training* comprises the following authorities and institutions:

- the Flemish Ministry of *Education and Training*, consisting of:
 - the *Department of Education and Training* in charge of policy support, headed by the Secretary-General
 - *Internal autonomous agencies* in charge of policy implementation headed by a general administrator:
 - * Agency for Educational services (elementary, secondary, part-time artistic education, pupil guidance centres and school guidance)
(Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten - AgODi)
 - * Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Allowances
(Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs en Studietoelagen - AHOVOS)
 - * Agency for Education Communication
(Agentschap voor Onderwijscommunicatie)
 - * Agency for School Infrastructure, an internal autonomous agency (IVA) with corporate personality
(Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs - AGIO)
 - * Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training
(Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming - AKOV)

The policy area *Work and Social Economy* comprises:

- The *Department of Work and Social Economy*
- The *Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service's (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding - VDAB)* prime concern is to put employers and jobseekers, mostly unemployed, in touch with each other. The VDAB is committed to provide the best possible support to every jobseeker in his search for an appropriate job. VDAB offers services regarding employment-finding, training and career counselling and placement guidance, with an emphasis on social inclusion. The VDAB vocational training system is organised through a network of 40 VDAB-managed

training centres (“competence centres”, dispersed over more or less 90 buildings) and recognised training centres (outsourcing of competence development through training contracts). All of these are delivering training provision in close cooperation with the social and training funds of the economic branches and are managed by the social partners and the Flemish Minister of Work. VDAB trains unemployed people (90%), secondary school pupils (last year of the technical and vocational secondary education programme, in collaboration with secondary education) as well as employees (max 10% of the training hours per year).

- The **Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA Vlaanderen (Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemingsvorming - SYNTRA Vlaanderen)** is the agency of the Flemish government that ensures and promotes qualitative, innovative and labour market oriented competence development of youngsters and adults with the aim of more and better entrepreneurship in Flanders. This is achieved by demand oriented offering of training and education, an online knowledge centre, several partnerships, actions towards specific target groups, a pilot role within the Objective 2 programme of the European Social Fund, European projects, quality assurance, evaluation, etc.

Within this broad context, new projects and plans are developed through an extensive sector approach. Moreover new products are being developed in collaboration with the SYNTRA network and other stakeholders. This means that SYNTRA Vlaanderen does not offer any training and education programmes itself. SYNTRA Vlaanderen relies for that on the private-law non-profit associations, “the SYNTRAs”. The SYNTRA network consists of SYNTRA Vlaanderen and 5 recognised centres (“the SYNTRAs”: SYNTRA Antwerp, SYNTRA Vlaams-Brabant, SYNTRA Brussels, SYNTRA Limburg, SYNTRA Midden-Vlaanderen and SYNTRA West). These centres have a statutory autonomous structure and are regionally embedded. In total the SYNTRA network comprises 24 campuses, geographically spread over the 5 SYNTRAs.

- The **Flemish Subsidy Agency for Work and Social Economy** supports and reinforces employment in the regular sector, the non-profit sector and social economy in Flanders by granting subsidies, authorisations and recognitions.
- The **ESF Agency Flanders** (non-profit association, a private-law externalised agency) manages the European Social Fund Flanders. The ESF supports training measures and employment arrangements and promotes the social integration and placement of the unemployed and the disadvantaged groups in the labour process.

Besides the administrations and institutions mentioned above, a number of other policy areas are involved in training programmes. In that case, government departments of specific policy areas develop and monitor (mostly vocational) training programmes in their specific area (e.g. agriculture, sports, culture, etc.).

ADVISORY AND CONSULTATION BODIES

- The **Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad – VLOR)** has the status of strategic advisory body within the policy area education and training. VLOR has competences regarding study, concerted action and consultation on all the educational issues under the authority of the Flemish Community. VLOR has to issue prior advice on all the draft education parliament acts and decrees, policy reports and documents to be presented to the Flemish Parliament. The various VLOR councils are composed of representatives from the educational-network umbrella organisations, VLIR (universities) and VLHORA (university colleges), the parents' associations umbrella organisations, students' and pupils' umbrella organisations, the teachers' unions, the socio-economic world (Flanders Social and Economic Council (**Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen - SERV**)) and the socio-cultural organisations, as well as representatives from continuing-education course participants, experience experts and directly-elected principals from Elementary, Secondary and Part-time Artistic Education, Centres for Adult Basic Education and Centres for Adult Education.
- The **Flemish Interuniversity Council (Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad – VLIR)** was established in 1976 to improve mutual understanding and cooperation amongst our universities. VLIR operates as a think tank and advises the Flemish government on all policy aspects higher education is involved in. University leaders and specialised staff members collaborate with VLIR to create consensus on a wide range of topics including degree structure, research management, quality assurance, student services, academic governance and so on.
- The **Flemish Council of University Colleges (Vlaamse Hogescholenraad – VLHORA)** is an independent council of 25 Flemish university colleges. This council advises the Flemish Community authorities on all policy aspects regarding higher education, scientific project research, social services and practice in the arts. It organises and stimulates consultation between institutions on all issues of interest to the university colleges. Since its foundation, it has strongly lobbied for professional higher education and has organised consultation between the university colleges.
- The Parliament Act on Higher Education of 4 April 2003 determined the Flemish universities, the university colleges and the associations had to create a Flemish **Council of Universities and University Colleges (Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad – VLUHR)** by the end of 2009. The role of the VLUHR would be to submit advisory reports to the minister responsible for higher education and to the minister responsible for science and innovation. These advisory reports will have to represent the opinion of universities and university colleges (being currently represented by separate organisations, VLIR and VLOHRA). The VLUHR is currently not yet fully operational.
- **Flanders Social and Economic Council (Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen – SERV)** is the consultative and advisory body of the Flemish social partners. The SERV comprises 10 representatives of the employers' organisations and 10 representatives of the trade unions. The SERV advises the Flemish parliament and the Flemish government on all economic and social policy matters. The SERV also houses a special unit that

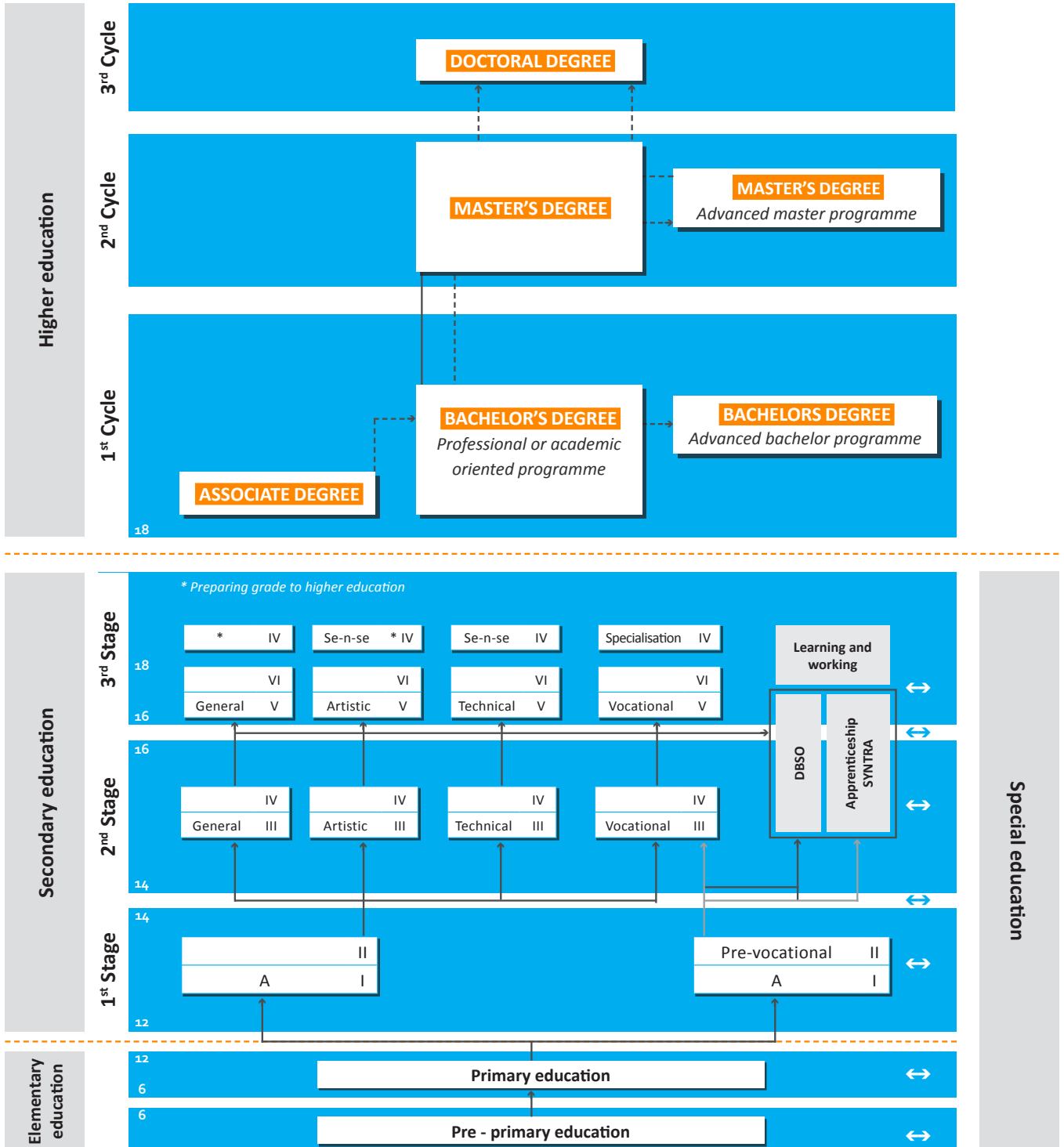
develops professional competence profiles. These profiles contain a detailed description of activities and the required competences, i.e. skills, know how and knowledge, that constitute the ability to exercise a profession.

I.2.3 Educational structure and certification

Flemish education is divided into *three levels*: elementary education, secondary education and higher education. In addition, there is also continuing education. Elementary education (basisonderwijs) consists of pre-primary education (2.5 to 6-year olds) and primary education (6 to 12-year olds).

On an elementary and secondary education level, there is mainstream and special education. Special education is intended for children who need special care, either on a temporary or permanent basis. This may be due to a physical or mental disability, due to serious behavioural or emotional problems or because of serious learning difficulties. Integrated education, on the other hand, is based on cooperation between mainstream and special education. It aims to give children suffering from a disability or learning or behavioural problems the opportunity to follow classes or activities in a school for mainstream education, with assistance from special education. This can be either temporary or permanent. It may involve all or a part of the classes. This type of education is not treated in the following paragraphs.

The Flemish educational structure is shown below.



Flanders' elementary and secondary education system has been organised into three distinct, main educational networks:

- **GO!**, (*Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*), *Flemish-Community Education*, which is funded by the Flemish Community and organised by a board and 28 school groups, composed of elementary and secondary schools.
- *Subsidised official education* is organised by cities, municipalities and provinces and is subsidised by the Flemish Community. Here, the municipal and provincial councils are the organising bodies. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Community Commission pursues a cross-network education policy which complements the Flemish Community policy. It also acts as the organising body for a number of subsidised Flemish schools located within the Brussels-Capital Region;
- *Subsidised private education* is organised by private-law organising bodies and is based on a specific denomination (Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism, Islam) or on a non-confessional philosophy of life or even on a specific pedagogical or educational principle (the so-called alternative schools such as Steiner and Freinet). These schools are recognised and subsidised by the Flemish Community. The overall majority of these schools belong to the Catholic educational network. The subsidised private education network counts for the majority of pupils.

In the following paragraphs we will provide a more concrete description of the different types of education in Flanders.

1.2.3.1 Pre-primary education

Infants may be registered in a pre-primary school (or nursery school) from the age of 2.5 years, and always on the day after the next school holidays. Once they reach the age of 3, infants can be registered on any school day. Pre-primary education is free of charge and not compulsory.

1.2.3.2 Primary education

Belgium does not operate a system of compulsory school attendance (*schoolplicht*) but compulsory education (*leerplicht*) which spans a period of 12 years and starts the school year children reach the age of 6 and ends at the end of the school year that the young adult turns 18 years old. So, it basically comprises both primary (6 years) and secondary education (6 years).

Primary education usually consists of 6 grades. Based on their pedagogical project, schools have to create an education and learning environment where pupils can experience a continuous learning process. This environment is adapted to the progression and development of the pupils. Primary education has to see to the pupils' wider personality development and has to lay the foundations for further education and social integration.

For primary education the Curriculum Entity (entity of AKOV) has formulated *final objectives* for five areas-of-learning and a set of cross-curricular final objectives which have been officialised in the Flemish Parliament Act of 15 July 1997. They are mandatory for all schools since 1 September 1998. The government considers the area-of-learning related final objectives regarding a minimum level of knowledge, understanding and skills to be peremptory and attainable for a specific pupil population. The primary objectives have to be acquired at the end of the 6th year of primary education.

Area-of-learning related final objectives regarding *attitudes*, on the other hand, only have to be aspired to by each school for all pupils. In addition, there are also *cross-curricular* final objectives which do not specifically apply to one area of learning but which can be aspired to by several areas of learning or educational projects

The certificate of elementary education can be obtained at the end of the 6th grade of primary education, the 1st grade of secondary education, as well as at the end of the pre-vocational year (i.e. the 2nd grade of secondary education for pupils who have completed the 1st grade B, where an equivalent certificate is presented).

1.2.3.3 Secondary education

Full-time secondary education is subdivided into 3 stages (*graden*) of two grades (*leerjaaren*) each.

The first stage has a common education form for all pupils (A grades), except for those preparing for vocational education (B grades):

- In 1st grade A and 1st grade B one differentiates between the *core curriculum* and an *optional part*.
- Aside from the *core curriculum*, pupils in 2nd grade A also follow *basic optional subjects* and an optional part.
- In the pre-vocational year there are, aside from the *core curriculum, occupational fields* and an optional part.

The second and third stages offer four types of education all further subdivided into areas of study within which pupils can choose a specific course of study:

- **General Secondary Education, (Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs - ASO)** aims at a broad theoretical education and prepares pupils for higher education;
- **Technical Secondary Education, (Technisch Secundair Onderwijs - TSO)** mainly focuses on general and technical-theoretical subjects combined with practical lessons and prepares pupils for a future career or for higher (technical) education;
- **Artistic Secondary Education, (Kunstsecundair Onderwijs - KSO)** combines a general and broad education with active artistic practice and prepares pupils for a future career or for higher (artistic) education;
- **Vocational Secondary Education, (Beroepssecundair Onderwijs - BSO)** teaches pupils specific vocational skills in combination with a general education, oriented towards a future career. Transition to higher education is possible but rather rare.

Per stage and per education form (as is the case in elementary education) subject-related and cross-curricular *final objectives* have been determined for the core curriculum. *Subject-related final objectives* in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills entail an obligation of result for the schools. Whether or not these are achieved will be assessed when the school is inspected and will be considered in light of the school context and the characteristics of the pupil population.

Attitudinal subject-related final objectives do not necessarily have to be achieved but should be pursued.

For the 1st stage, *cross-curricular final objectives* were formulated regarding ‘learning to learn’, ‘social skills’, ‘civic education’, ‘health education’, ‘environmental education’ and ICT, while for the 2nd and 3rd stages, these have been supplemented by ‘artistic-creative education’ and ‘technical-technological education’ (the latter only for ASO). The cross-curricular final objectives entail an obligation of effort for the schools.

Only in respect of the core curriculum of 1st grade B and the pre-vocational year of the 1st stage, *subject-related and cross-curricular developmental aims* have been formulated instead of final objectives.

For the different fields of study in the 2nd and 3rd stage, *specific final objectives* have been developed. These are objectives regarding skills, specific knowledge, understanding and attitudes a pupil in full-time secondary education has to have to embark on further education and/or to function as a beginning professional. Currently there are only specific final objectives in place for the fields of study within ASO.

Pupils are assessed by means of *tests* and *examinations*, organised by the individual teacher under the ultimate responsibility of the school’s organising body. Continuous assessment is also an option.

In secondary education, the class council acts as the central assessment body. The class council consist of the principal or his representative and all the members of the education team teaching a pupil in a specific grade.

In secondary education, the class council jointly decides on the pupil’s transition and on the conferral of an orientation certificate (*oriënteringsattest*). Three types of certificates are handed out:

- A: student passes
- B: selective transition, excluding some education forms or courses of study
- C: students has to repeat the school year

A *diploma* of secondary education may be conferred at the end of the 3rd stage of ASO, TSO, KSO and the 3rd grade of the 3rd stage of BSO organised as a specialisation year. At the end of the other stages *certificates (getuigschriften)* may be issued.

I.2.3.4 Part-time compulsory education

Pupils can opt for part-time compulsory education combined with part-time working from the age of 16 or even from the age of 15 provided they have completed the 1st stage of secondary education and this until they turn 25 years of age. Part-time compulsory education is only possible in vocational education. The reformed alternance-training system henceforth requires youngsters' **full-time commitment** for no less than 28 hours a week (just like in full-time secondary education) and comprises a component 'learning' and a component 'on-the-job learning'. Youngsters may choose between:

- **apprenticeship (leertijd)** which combines theoretical training at one of the SYNTRA campuses with practical training in an SME (under an apprenticeship contract with the employer), The programmes consist of one day theoretical training in a SYNTRA centre a week and 4 days on the job training in an enterprise a week.
- **part-time education** in one of the Centres for Part-Time Vocational Education (**Centra voor Deeltijds Beroepssecundair Onderwijs- CDO's**), connected to secondary schools offering full-time TSO (technical secondary education) or BSO (vocational secondary education). In combination with on-the-job-learning which can either consist of labour-market participation, a personal-development pathway, a preparatory pathway or a bridging project.

Depending on the type of learning, part-time education can lead to a certificate of acquired competences (**attest van verworven competenties**), a certificate, a modular certificate or a diploma. Apprenticeships lead to a professional qualification and an educational qualification (second grade certificate, third grade certificate or diploma of secondary school). This is comparable with BSO.

I.2.3.5 Secondary after secondary education (Secundair na Secundair – Se-n-Se)

With the approval of the Parliament Act on Secondary after Secondary Education and Associate Degrees (30th April 2009), the former 3rd grade of the 3rd stage of secondary education of TSO and KSO has been replaced by secondary after secondary education (Se-n-Se). Se-n-Se focuses on employment-oriented education and has to fulfil specific needs for qualifications of sectors. As for other vocational education programmes, the sectors will develop the professional competence profiles that are used to define the curricula. All Se-n-Se programmes require active collaboration with business and industry through work based learning. The existing grades will be screened to comply with the new options ultimately by 1st September 2012.

Se-n-Se programmes can start twice a year, in September and February. The possibility to start a new programme in February offers the opportunity to reorient students during a school year. Se-n-Se can last 1 to 3 semesters and are organised by secondary education institutions. The programmes result in a Se-n-Se certificate.

1.2.3.6 Higher education

The Flemish higher-education system consists of statutory registered institutions and registered institutions. Statutory registered institutions are the universities, university colleges, religious institutions, graduate studies institutions and institutions for postgraduate studies in fine arts. All these institutions receive funding from the relevant authorities. Registered institutions on the other hand do not receive funding but are formally recognised as higher education institutions.

Finally, university colleges can link up with one particular university in a so-called association in order to be able to offer academically oriented higher education programmes.

ASSOCIATE DEGREES

One of the consequences of the Parliament Act on Secondary after Secondary Education and Associate Degrees was the creation of educational programmes to attain an associate degree (*Hoger Beroepsonderwijs – HBO5*). These programmes are considered vocationally-oriented higher education. They are situated just beneath the level of a professional bachelor.

At this moment only the Centres for Adult Education organise HBO5 programmes, except for the nursing training (former 4th stage of BSO) that is offered by secondary education institutions. University colleges will offer this kind of programmes as well. The education will be organised modularly in the future. Currently linear systems continue to exist until 2014.

BACHELOR'S – MASTER'S STRUCTURE

The Parliament Act on Higher Education of 4 April 2003 reorganised the entire structure of higher education and created one legal framework for university colleges and universities. Pursuant to the Bachelor's-Master's structure the following types of programmes are organised:

- *Professionally oriented bachelor's programmes* have the objective to bring students to a level of general and specific knowledge and competences required to perform a particular profession or group of professions independently. A professionally oriented bachelor's programme can therefore lead directly to a place on the labour market.
- *Academically oriented bachelor's programmes* are primarily oriented toward further studies at Master's level. The main objective of the *academically oriented bachelor's programmes* is to bring the students to a certain level of scientific or artistic knowledge and competences, required for scientific or artistic work in general, and towards a specific field of sciences or arts in particular and mainly geared towards further studies. Preparing students for the labour market is only a secondary objective.

- **Master's programmes** are offered by universities and university colleges (in the latter case, it needs to be organised within the framework of an association). **Master degree studies** have the objective to bring students to an advanced level of scientific or artistic knowledge and competences required for scientific or artistic work in general, and to a specific domain of sciences and arts in particular, which is required for autonomous scientific or artistic work or to apply this scientific or artistic knowledge independently in one or a group of professions.
- For further in-depth-study students can follow advanced bachelor's programmes, advanced master's programmes and postgraduate studies. Each **advanced bachelor's programme (bachelor na bachelor – banaba)** builds on a professionally oriented bachelor's programme. This programme aims at broadening of or specializing in competences acquired during the initial bachelor's programme. **Advanced master programmes (master na master – manama)** are developed to further explore the knowledge and/or competences acquired within a particular area of study. Postgraduates can be started after acquiring a bachelor or master degree. A postgraduate has the same goal as an advance programme, namely specializing in a certain study area, but leads to a certificate.
- The highest level of scientific specialisation is the **doctoral programme**. Doctorates are based on original scientific research and culminate in the candidate defending his/her doctoral dissertation in public.

In higher education, the recognised bachelor and master's programmes are listed in the higher education register.

The workload of the different higher education programmes is expressed in credits, on the basis of the ECTS credit system:

- Professionally and academically oriented **bachelor's programmes** comprise a minimum of 180 credits (which more or less corresponds to 3 study years of 60 credits each);
- **Master programmes** follow after a bachelor's degree and comprise at least 60 credits.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING

The *Parliament Act on flexible learning* of 30 April 2004 allows for more *flexible learning paths*, with increased opportunities for changing between programmes and institutions, enhanced differentiation i.a. in respect of the types of programmes on offer, and more opportunities for lifelong learning. Some of the basic principles, in which higher education institutions can fill in the credit system at their own discretion, are the following:

- The year system was replaced by a *credits system*.
- The *programme* is and remains the basic and structural unit but is no longer seen as the sum total of academic years but as one ordered unit of programme components.
- Institutions may grant students exemptions on the basis of *recognition of acquired qualifications (erkenning verworven kwalificaties - EVK) and/or recognition of acquired competences (erkenning verworven competenties - EVC)*.
- To *monitor* the *study progress* in an orderly manner and to take preemptory action when things go wrong, the Parliament Act provides for several measures. For example, binding conditions may be imposed on a student at the time of admission (such as an interim evaluation or a minimum of study performance) and at-risk students may be refused if they have already been given several opportunities.

CERTIFICATION

The competent authority of a higher education institution confers the title of Bachelor or Master if the student has successfully completed the Bachelor's programme or Master's programme. The title of doctor is awarded by a university jury after a public presentation of a doctoral dissertation which confirms the capability of the creation of new scientific knowledge based upon independent scientific research. The doctoral dissertation should have the potential to lead to publications in scientific journals. The board of the institution issues a credit certificate if the student has passed a course-component exam.

I.2.3.7 Continuing education

Several systems offer continuing education in Flanders:

- *Adult education*, which now consists of:
 - ◆ adult basic education, organised by Centres for Adult Basic Education (*Centra voor basiseducatie – CBE's*);
 - ◆ secondary adult education and associate degrees, organised by Centres for Adult Education (*Centra voor volwassenenonderwijs – CVO's*).

On the one hand adult education aims at equipping the course participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for personal development, social functioning, further education, practising a vocation or proficiency in a language and, on the other hand, to give the course participants the opportunity to obtain recognised proofs of study.

- > **Vocational training** organised by the **VDAB** at its own competence centres. Training programmes of VDAB aim to fulfil shortage occupation on the Flemish labour market. This kind of training focuses on three pivotal objectives with a view to lifelong and sustainable labour market participation:
 - ◆ Stimulating, organising and enhancing the development and recognition of competences in job seekers functional to the labour market (based on the demands of vacancies, occupations or functions), specifically through the establishment of competence centres, accreditation of prior learning and the organisation of training programmes;
 - ◆ Hosting, organising and facilitating vocational training and the accompanying guidance for job seekers and employees in training centres and/or on the shop floor;
 - ◆ Granting allowances for training programmes (social inclusion, groups with a weakened position on the labour market) and the management and distribution of training vouchers for the employed.

- > Entrepreneurial training, developed by **SYNTRA Vlaanderen** and organised, at the campuses of the SYNTRA Network for Entrepreneurial Training. Through its entrepreneurial training, SYNTRA Vlaanderen offers high-quality and specific vocational training for youngsters and adults who intend to become self-employed or who are seeking a career in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector and therefore foster entrepreneurship as an essential factor of socio-economical development. At various levels, these vocational training programmes are competence based, completed with the sectors' needs and organised in a modular way where work alternates with training and where the trainers use their own entrepreneurial experience to teach so that participants can compile the package most suited to them.

- > **Part-time artistic education (Deeltijds kunstonderwijs - DKO)**, organised by academies for visual arts and music, word craft and dance. These programmes foster pupils' general interest in arts, facilitates artistic creation, teaches people how to discern art and prepares youngsters for higher artistic education.

- > **Training in agriculture**, organised by centres for agriculture. This training focuses on all those employed in agriculture and horticulture and employees of organisations for the management of agricultural and horticultural businesses (self-employed owners, their collaborating family members, employees, contractors), florists and garden contractors, employees of public-park departments, recognised sellers and users of phytocides and recognised users of biocides for agricultural use and also beekeepers. Training for beginners is available to all those wishing to find employment in any of these sectors. Hobby agriculturists can register for short training activities.

- > **Training in sports**, offered by the Flemish school for coaches, an institution that is recognised by parliament act to provide trainings in sports, mainly focussing on sports coaches, monitors and managers.

- **Non-formal socio-cultural adult work**, organised by various types of socio-cultural institutions. Socio-cultural adult work focuses on the balanced development of each individual, the development of competences, people's sense of meaning and emancipation, with a view to enhanced cultural development and social integration so that people can live in a genuine and strong democratic society.
- **Sector training**: A lot of sectors of activity offer specialised training programmes linked to the occupational sector concerned (e.g. construction, textile, wood-working, chemical industry, etc.). In most cases these programmes are managed by the social partners.
- **Private companies** offer a broad range of training programmes. Most of these companies are specialised in one or more specific areas, such as languages, IT, management and leadership, communication, environment, human resources management, etc. These companies mainly operate in the business-to-business market, offering training programmes to companies wanting to develop their employees. A limited number of private companies have been accredited by the NVAO so far and now officially offer higher education programmes.

CURRICULUM AND CERTIFICATION

Adult basic education offers courses at primary-education level and at the level of the first stage of secondary education: Dutch (NT1 Dutch-as-a-first-language), ICT, social orientation, mathematics, languages (step-up courses French and English). The final objectives for adult basic education are partly specifically developed for this type of learning and partly based on those used in primary education and the first stage of secondary education.

Moreover, the centres also organise courses in the areas of study Dutch-as-a-second-language literacy education (NT2) at orientation-grade level 1 of the European Framework of Reference for foreign languages.

Secondary adult education (the former Secondary Social-Advancement Education) comprises all courses of study organised at full-time secondary-education level other than the first stage. At secondary level, there are 31 areas of study, available in linear and/or modular form. However, all programmes will have to become modular by 1 September 2012, at the latest.

HBO5, associate degrees, comprises vocationally-oriented training programmes organised at higher-education level which do not lead to a Bachelor's or Master's degree. With HBO5 Flanders wants to anticipate the needs of people who are not interested in a bachelor degree, but want to obtain a recognized specialised professional qualification at a higher education level through a shorter or part time programme, immediately after secondary education or later on, during their professional career.

Adult education confers various types of *proofs of study*:

- A modular certificate (**deelcertificaat**) ratifies one course module
- A certificate (**certificaat**) ratifies one entire course
- A special certificate (**getuigschrift**) ratifies the course 'business administration' within the area of study 'commerce'
- A diploma

VDAB organises hundreds of practically-oriented vocational training programmes in almost all vocational and attitudinal (work related behaviour, adaptation to the work situation, career and job-orientation courses) fields and also offers Dutch-as-a-second-language and ICT-courses. These courses are offered in a flexible and individually tailored way (time table, methods, place, module scheduled). They are organised in various ways such as courses in VDAB training centres or with third parties, work experience in companies, training in recognised centres, individual vocational in-company training or individual training at an educational institution, open learning, distance learning and e-learning.

On-the-job learning is available through:

- **Work-experience placements** as a permanent feature of any regular training programme offered by a competence centre. The distinction between perfecting-work-experience placements and alternance work-experience placements has been abandoned.
- **Individual vocational in-company training (Individuele beroepsopleiding in de onderneming - IBO)**. Here, the course participants are trained and guided by the company they work for, a training programme is defined between the employer and the VDAB.
- **Induction training**. This puts the finishing touches to vocational training or a vocational training programme (for school-leavers) and is company-oriented. Induction training lasts 2 months and has to start within 4 months of the end of vocational training (organised or recognised by the VDAB) or education (for school-leavers with a diploma or proof of study of the first stage of ASO, the second stage of TSO, BSO, KSO, entrepreneurial training, DBSO, alternance vocational education). Once the IBO or induction training has been completed, the host company has to offer the course participants an indefinite employment contract.

Course participants following VDAB vocational training are continuously followed-up and assessed throughout their (modular) training. Participants can obtain a certificate (**attest**) for certain courses they have attended. In the case of e-learning, the course participant receives a certificate (**getuigschrift**) once he/she has been positively evaluated by his/her coach. These types of certificates (**attesten**) do not have any formal or legal value and they are not recognised as being equivalent to the recognised proofs of study issued by the actual educational sector. However, they enjoy de facto recognition from the world of enterprise. Moreover, within VDAB, there are various forms of *certification*:

- Certificates (**getuigschriften**) which specify the contents of the course components the course participant has successfully completed;
- Certificates (**getuigschriften**) with an additional sector or company certificate (**certificaat**) which backs up the first certificate as proof of acquired competences;
- Certificates (**getuigschriften**) with a supplementary legal certificate (**getuigschrift**) which allows students to prepare for an examination organised outside of VDAB;
- Proofs of experience.

SYNTRA Vlaanderen develops and ensures various types of **entrepreneurial training**:

- Apprenticeships (see I.2.4.3)
- '**Entrepreneurial training**' takes 1 to 3 years and comprises theoretical training (professional technical training and business administration) which may be combined with an internship of no less than 6 months in which the course participant receives his practical training in a company, either on a full-time or part-time basis.
- The course '**business administration**' takes 1 year and leads to the certificate (**getuigschrift**) 'business administration basics', a prerequisite for anyone seeking to obtain a business licence; the course '**business management for SMES**' is aimed at managers and people in senior positions and requires a higher level of prior education.
- **Certified advanced training programmes** which lead to a specific Flemish government diploma or certificate (**getuigschrift**).
- There are well over 350 different **uncertified advanced training programmes**, aimed at the self-employed, SME managers and their senior staff.
- **Tailor-made training programmes** where training consultants develop an overall training plan on a step-by-step basis which dovetails as closely as possible with the personal needs and ambitions of the (head of) the company.

Entrepreneurial training, organised by the **SYNTRA Network for Entrepreneurial Training**, issues various types of **certificates**:

- Course participants who successfully complete their entrepreneurial training receive a diploma which meets the Business-Licensing Act conditions in terms of adequate professional knowledge and in terms of basic knowledge of business administration.
- Certified advanced training which dovetails with entrepreneurial training results in an official Flemish Community certificate. Uncertified advanced training (topical themes, business administration and management themes, new legislation...) lead to a SYNTRA Vlaanderen certificate (**attest**).

Part-time artistic education offers a very broad and diverse range of courses in dance, music, visual arts and word craft. After each grade which has been successfully completed the pupil receives a *certificate (attest or getuigschrift)*. This certificate has no 'civic force' but merely shows that the pupil in question has acquired the competences of a particular level.

Training in agriculture offers courses for beginners, training courses of at least 20 hours, work experience placements, short training activities and completion days to provide advanced training for its trainers. The theoretical classes consist of a theoretical exposition by a trainer which may be followed by a discussion or a practical demonstration given by the trainer to the course participant. During the practical lessons, the course participants practise the practical aspect of the subject, under the guidance of a trainer, where necessary, after a brief theoretical introduction. Work experience consists of 8 hours on-the-job learning.

Training in agriculture leaves the initiative of assessment to the centres. All courses are concluded with a course test and the students who pass the test receive a *certificate (getuigschrift)*. Students who have successfully completed an agricultural or horticultural course for beginners receive a certificate for establishing a business, which allows the beginner to establish him/herself as a farmer or horticulturist with the assistance of the Flemish Agricultural Investment Fund (*VLIF - Vlaams Landbouwinvesteringsfonds*).

The *Flemish school for coaches* is an institution that is recognised by parliament act to provide trainings in sports. It is a partnership between the Agency for the Advancement of Physical Development, Sport and Outdoor Recreation (*Agentschap voor de Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en de Openluchtrecreatie - Bloso*), Flemish universities and university colleges offering programmes in sports and the Flemish sports federation. More concretely, the institution organises programmes regarding different types of sports, sports monitors, jobs related to sports (life savers, swimming pool managers, civil servants in sports,...), training to monitor specific groups of people (e.g. disabled, elderly). The Flemish school for coaches aims at improving the quality of sport activities and therefore organises trainings for coaches, monitors and managers. It hands out about 500 *certificates* a year. The information regarding students that obtained a diploma is registered in a central database. This school is mentioned in a lot of parliament acts as being the referencing body to recognise qualifications in sports.

The course provision within *socio-cultural adult work* is extremely wide-ranging. In Socio-cultural Adult Work, the methods are determined by the intervention strategy employed. The main ones are:

- establishing a context in which course participants can learn in an informal manner through interaction with others and/or through self-reflection, and the non-formal guidance of course participants (i.e. forms of learning-process guidance which are not linked to pre-set programmes and final objectives specified by third parties);
- activating people socially on various collective issues and themes with a view to social integration and/or participation;

- stimulating community-building and social contact;
- creating a context in which culture, interpretation and the creation of symbols is facilitated and encouraged.

The emphasis of socio-cultural adult work lies on informal and non-formal learning. It fosters both incidental and intentional learning. In socio-cultural adult work interventions and guidance are not interpreted as transference of information from trainer to individual. Quite the opposite in fact, the participant is an active partner who helps to determine both the contents of and the approach to the programmes, projects and activities in some form or other.

Course participants of socio-cultural adult work receive *proofs of learning*, which is a certificate of training and non-formal education experience. A proof of learning shows that a coherent section of competences has effectively been mastered. Since 2006, also function proofs have been introduced in socio-cultural adult work. A function proof is a certificate which proves that certain competences have been acquired through voluntary work or other forms of commitment.

I.2.4 Quality assurance and evaluation

I.2.4.1 Compulsory education

Schools decide autonomously on their educational methods, curriculums, timetables and the recruitment of their personnel. The government ensures the quality of education by imposing conditions to be met by the schools in order for them to become accredited and receive financial support.

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The system of quality control and promotion by the government is built on 3 pillars:

- **The curriculum entity:** Final objectives are minimum goals which the government considers necessary and achievable for a particular group of pupils. In concrete terms, this concerns knowledge, insight, attitudes and skills. They are subject-related final objectives but also cross-curricular ones. Final objectives are developed by the Curriculum entity within AKOV. They are submitted to advice by the VLOR, then approved by the Flemish government and finally validated by an Act of the Flemish Parliament. Every governing body or school board must include the final objectives in the school learning programmes.
- **The inspectorate:** The educational inspectorate of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training acts as a professional body of external supervision by assessing the implementation of these final objectives.

It comprises five inspection teams:

- ◆ the inspection team for nursery and primary education
 - ◆ the inspection team for secondary education
 - ◆ the inspection team for part-time arts education
 - ◆ the inspection team for adult education and adult basic education
 - ◆ the inspection team for pupil guidance centres
- **Educational guidance:** Each educational network has its own educational guidance service (**Pedagogische Begeleidingsdienst - PBD**), which ensures professional internal support to schools and centres. Schools can call on them for educational and methodological advisory services (innovation projects, self-evaluation projects, support initiatives). Educational guidance works across schools for the in-service training and support of head teachers. Educational guidance also has an important role in the establishment of new curriculums and supports their implementation. If the inspectorate detects shortcomings in schools, the educational guidance service may be called on to address them.

More information about the quality assurance approach of compulsory education and adult education is included in chapter II.6.

1.2.4.2 Higher education

INTERNAL EVALUATION

The Parliament Act on Higher Education dd. 4 April 2003 states that higher education institutions are responsible for the internal quality assurance of their research activities and educational activities. They have to monitor the quality of the research activities permanently and at their own initiative.

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Higher education institutions are responsible for the internal quality assurance of their research activities and educational activities.

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This also applies to educational activities. Moreover, they have to involve students, alumni and external experts in the processes of internal and external quality assurance. More information about the internal quality assurance approach of higher education institutions is included in chapter II.6

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

For Bachelor's and Master's programmes, external assessments per programme or cluster of programmes must take place at least every eight years. Assessment agencies or international accreditation bodies can organise and coordinate these so-called **external reviews (visitaties)** of programmes.

In light of the Bologna process a decision was taken to introduce accreditation (building on internal evaluations and external reviews). To that end, a joint **accreditation organisation** with the Netherlands was set up in 2003, the **NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie)**. More information about the external review in higher education is included in chapter II.6.

I.2.4.3 Continuing education

A large number of other institutions provide training programmes, mainly in the area of vocational training. We mention here some of the most important ones: VDAB, SYNTRA, centres for agriculture, socio-cultural institutions, the Flemish school for coaches, etc. The quality approach that is defined for primary, secondary and higher education does not apply to these institutions. A number of these institutions have developed their own quality systems, see chapter II.6.

I.2.5 Flemish policy regarding education, training and link with the labour market

This paragraph will explain the most important characteristics of the *current* Flemish policy regarding education and training. Some of the policy initiatives are directly related to the Flemish qualifications framework; others have less impact, but are important to understand the Flemish context.

A number of evolutions in Flemish society and the area of education of training have been taken into account to determine the priorities for the Flemish policy regarding education and training:

- Demographic evolutions such as an increasing inflow of new pupils (birth rates are raising since 2003), growth of the Flemish population due to immigration, aging of the Flemish population in general and the teachers population in particular.
- Evolutions in the labour market such as a growth of the tertiary sector often requiring competences regarding (abstract) information processing and an increase of the level of education of the Flemish population (e.g. 88% of Flemish youngster hold a secondary education diploma whereas the European average is 75,8%), the persistence of a number of shortage professions (often requiring vocational or technical skills), inequalities in lifelong learning with a lower participation of lower-skilled people and older people.
- Social and cultural developments such as the fact that education is not able to mitigate the effects of the social background of pupils what results in lower success rates for children of low-skilled parents and a changing attitude towards education, being more and more considered as a consumer product.

Regarding the *Flemish structures for education and training*, important changes have taken place with regard to higher education during the previous period. In line with the Bologna process the Master-Bachelor structure was introduced, universities and university colleges constituted associations and a reform of all existing educational programmes took place. All the new educational programmes have to receive an accreditation by the end of the school year 2012-2013. For the coming years the Flemish Minister of Education plans to further integrate university education, starting from the positioning of the Flemish higher education within a European and global knowledge society.

After the reform of higher education, a new initiative is launched to implement important changes in *secondary education*, trying to decrease social inequalities, to improve the results of low-performing pupils and to reduce the outflow of non-qualified pupils (currently 15%). Therefore, one of the main objectives of the reform is to link the structures and programs of secondary education to the Flemish Qualifications Framework.

This means that compared to the current system, more emphasis will be put on developing competences. The new policy wants to abolish the established differences between knowledge, skills and attitudes and introduce competences as a reference within secondary education.

As indicated in chapter 1.2., *associate degrees* have been implemented with the introduction of HBO5 (*Hoger Beroepsopleiding*). To fully implement this structure initiatives are planned with regard to the development of a quality system for associate degrees, a better cooperation between educational institutions and professional organisations to create sufficient opportunities to learn on the job and an increased collaboration between institutions for higher educations and Centres for Adult Education.

Moreover, collaboration with SYNTRA and VDAB is stimulated. These institutions would also be able to offer parts of associate degree programmes (which is not the case today).

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Initiatives are planned with regard to the development of a quality system for associate degrees, a better cooperation between educational institutions and professional organisations to create sufficient opportunities to learn on the job and an increased collaboration between institutions for higher educations and Centres for Adult Education.

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Regarding the link between education and training and the labour market, both policy documents of the Minister of Education and of the Minister of Work mention a *closer alignment* between those two policy domains. To formalise this collaboration an overarching management committee Education, Training and Work has been created to prepare and monitor policy decisions. Moreover a protocol for collaboration between the Ministers of Education and Training on the one hand and Work on the other hand will be developed.

In line with the European developments regarding *“New Skills for New Jobs”*, the Flemish government wants to develop an instrument that allows making long-term forecasts about the labour market and *competence requirements*. Other actions that have been identified as important elements to improve the alignment between education and the labour market are the following:

- More intense collaboration between the VDAB and CLB’s to support youngsters in their choice of study and their educational career
- A renewed strategic plan “Entrepreneurial Education and Training” to stimulate entrepreneurial orientation in education and training (with an important role for the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA Vlaanderen)

The system of apprenticeships (vocational education) offered by SYNTRA Vlaanderen will be reviewed and optimized in the coming year. Measures are to be taken to increase the number of apprenticeship participants and the qualified outflow and to innovate the curricula.

I.3 The Flemish Qualifications Framework

I.3.1 Policy decision

In the period preceding the development of a *Flemish qualifications framework*, policy makers in Flanders found that within Flanders an enormous amount of competences is present, amongst others due to a high-quality educational system. A lot of these competences however remain unused or underused. Many youngsters experience difficulties to find a job and the unqualified outflow is still too high. Moreover, the number of structural shortage professions keeps rising. The labour supply and demand have therefore to be better aligned. Furthermore, our knowledge-based economy requires companies to attract qualified profiles and to permanently maintain the competences of job seekers and employees. Job contents tend to change over years (because of new production techniques, new types of jobs, etc.) which requires employees to permanently develop new competences. Because of these evolutions in our society, it is important that people can learn in a simple, fast and efficient way. However, today a lot of obstacles impede an easy access to learning programmes and an efficient use and recognition of knowledge and skills already acquired. Moreover, there is too little understanding of qualifications, little experience with recognition of qualifications and almost no possibilities to transfer qualifications from one learning environment to another. Finally, informal and non-formal learning results are considered as being inferior compared to formal qualifications.

Therefore the policy areas Education and Training and Work and Social Economy jointly decided to build a “learning and working Flanders”, where nobody is excluded. One of the key goals of the current education and training policy in Flanders is to improve the connection between education and training and the labour market. This will contribute to equal chances and a better alignment of labour supply and demand. This objective fits into the Lisbon objectives and into Flanders own future-oriented strategy called “Flanders in Action” (*Vlaanderen in Actie*). The global objective of this strategy is to become one of the top 5 European regions by 2020. To achieve this objective, seven key areas have been selected, lifelong learning being one of them. Therefore Flanders wants to develop a learning society that stimulates investments in exploring, developing and deploying competences. The Flemish government wants to decrease the amount of people who do not have any form of qualification and increase the recognition of existing competences. The objectives of the strategy “Flanders in Action” have been translated into concrete performance indicators. These are included in a convention called “Pact 2020” that has been signed by the Flemish government, the social partners and civil society organisations.

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One of the key goals of the current education and training policy in Flanders is to improve the connection between education and training and the labour market.

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The competence agenda 2010, which was agreed with the social partners and the protocol with the education and training institutions include a number of concrete engagements of the Flemish government, the social partners and the education and training providers to develop and deploy the competences of the Flemish citizen to a maximum. One of the ten actions included in the competence agenda is to build a coordinated and consistent policy to recognize acquired competences (EVC)³. To stimulate the recognition of acquired competences, there is a need for a common unambiguous reference framework that is linked to the European framework and that replaces the different, parallel classification systems.

The ambition of the Flemish qualifications framework is to offer such a reference framework.

1.3.2 Approved but not yet implemented

As further explained in the following paragraphs, a Flemish qualifications framework has been developed and approved by the Flemish Parliament in 2009. This is still the current state of affairs. Since the approval, discussions have been going on between the stakeholders concerned to develop implementation decrees that will enable the application of the framework, but have not resulted in any concrete proposals yet.

A number of issues remain to be clarified. This means that implementation decrees regarding the procedures to describe and align professional qualifications and the criteria to elaborate educational qualifications and their positioning in the educational structure are not finalised nor approved yet.

“ The implementation decrees regarding the procedures to describe and align professional qualifications and the criteria to elaborate educational qualifications and their positioning in the educational structure are not finalised nor approved yet. ”

1.3.3 Development process

A first proposal for the European Qualifications Framework was developed at the end of 2005. In February 2008 it was translated into a European recommendation. Meanwhile a number of evolutions were taking place in Flanders as well:

- New educational approaches were developed that focus on learning outcomes. Competence-oriented education aims achieving results in terms of learning outcomes and acquired competences.
- The signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999 led towards a new qualification structure for higher education in Flanders. The most important evolution is the fact that the structure is no longer based on learning objectives or length of studies but on learning outcomes of the educational programmes.

³ In Flanders ‘recognizing acquired competences’ is related to formal learning as well as non-formal and informal learning.

The concept of “recognising acquired competences” (accreditation of prior learning) was introduced to allow people that developed competences through their job, voluntary work or other experiences to proof and value their competences.

“The Flemish Qualifications Framework (FQF) is the result of intensive studying, discussions with international experts, participation to international seminars, consultation of stakeholders and pilot projects.”

The Flemish Qualifications Framework (FQF) is the result of intensive studying, discussions with international experts, participation to international seminars, consultation of stakeholders and pilot projects.

Since a number of European member states and other countries have been developing their qualifications frameworks at the same time, Flanders had the opportunity to exchange ideas with experts working on the National Qualifications Framework of England, Wales and Northern-Ireland and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the New Zealand and Australian Credit and Qualifications Framework, the Irish and South-African frameworks and the French “Répertoire Nationale de Certification”. In collaboration with the European Commission and Cedefop a seminar regarding the level descriptors with English, Norwegian and Czech colleagues was organised in January 2006.

The development of the Flemish framework took place at the same time as the development of the European Qualifications Framework. From July until December 2005 the European Commission organised a broad consultation with regard to the EQF. About hundred Flemish organisations took part in these discussions, such as advisory and consultative bodies, educational institutions and social partners. All stakeholders concerned reacted positively to the EQF and were aware of the importance of an alignment of qualifications and qualifications structures between the EU member states.

The descriptors of existing qualifications systems were analysed and their relevance for a Flemish qualifications framework was verified. It concerned the structures developed by Bloom-Krathwohl, Romiszowski and Lundvall-Johnson, the competence classifications used by the Flemish government to describe competence profiles and existing job classification systems.

The approval of the Parliament Act on the *Flemish qualifications structure* on 30 April 2009 was an important step in the evolution towards life-long learning and the valorisation of competences. As mentioned in the previous paragraph already, the use of the Flemish qualifications framework to align educational programmes, to develop assessments for the recognition of acquired competences and to actually assess the level of qualifications, will only be possible once a number of *implementation decrees* will be developed and approved.

The similarity between the EQF and Flemish Qualifications Frameworks is very clear. Both frameworks consist of 8 level descriptors, containing elements of knowledge, skills and competences. A detailed comparison (see chapter II.3) will show however that there are also a number of differences. Since both frameworks were developed during the same period, the Flemish Qualifications Framework took into account the structure of the EQF, without necessarily aiming at the same structure and subdivision.

I.3.4 General characteristics and overview of level descriptors

Before the Flemish Qualifications Framework is described, a number of terms and the way they are interpreted with regard to the FQF are explained.

Many definitions describe the term *“competence”*. The OESO states that competences are more than only knowledge or only skills. Both elements are included in a competence as well as attitudes. The Flemish definitions are related to this. The VLOR and SERV use definitions that, besides the three elements already mentioned, also refer to the fact that competences allow people to act effectively in different situations. The Parliament Act of 30 April 2009 describes competence as *“the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes when performing social activities, and integrate these into one’s actions. In higher education competences are called subject-specific learning outcomes”*.

All definitions suggest that to acquire competences one has to undergo a learning process. Competences and their compiling elements are nothing else than the learning outcomes a person achieved. The way how this happened and the learning process itself are less important. People can acquire competences at work, at school or at home. *Learning outcomes and competences are convertible terms in Flanders.*

A *qualification* (cf. Parliament Act) is a complete and aligned set of competences/learning outcomes. “Complete” means that the total set of competences is relevant to exercise a profession or to start further education. “Aligned” means that the qualification is related to a certain qualification level of the FQF. The number of competences that is included in a qualification is not fixed, but the total set has to comprise all relevant aspects.

The Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure defines the qualifications framework and the level descriptors, the kinds of qualifications as well as the procedures to recognize them.

The Flemish qualifications framework distinguishes between eight levels, ranging from level 1 to level 8. Each level within the framework is described by means of a level descriptor. A level descriptor offers a generic description of the characteristics of the competences typical for the qualifications at that level, and consists of five descriptor elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. These elements determine the level of the qualification.

	<i>Knowledge / Skills</i>	<i>Context / Autonomy / Responsibility</i>
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ recognising materials, concise, unambiguous information and simple, concrete basic concepts and rules of a part of a specific area ➤ applying one or more of the following skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » cognitive skills: retrieving information from one's memory, remembering and applying it » motorical skills: using automatisms and imitating practical actions ➤ performing repetitive and recognisable actions in routine tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in a stable, familiar, simple and well-structured context, in which time pressure is of little importance ➤ acting with non-delicate objects ➤ functioning under direct supervision ➤ showing personal effectiveness
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ understanding information, concrete concepts and standard procedures within a specific area ➤ applying one or more of the following skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » cognitive skills: analysing information by distinguishing and relating elements » motorical skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transforming sensory perceptions into motorical actions - performing acquired practical-technical actions ➤ applying a selected number of standard procedures when performing tasks: applying prescribed strategies to solve a limited number of concrete, recognisable problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in a limited number of comparable, simple, familiar contexts ➤ acting with delicate, passive objects ➤ functioning under supervision with limited autonomy ➤ take limited executive responsibility for one's work
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ understanding a number of abstract concepts, laws, formulas and methods within a specific area; distinguishing between major and minor issues in information ➤ applying one or more of the following skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » cognitive skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analysing information using deduction and induction - synthesizing information » motorical skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - making constructions based on a plan - performing actions which require tactical and strategic insight » applying artistic-creative skills ➤ choosing, combining and applying standard procedures and methods to perform tasks and solve a variety of well-defined, concrete problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in comparable contexts in which a number of factors change ➤ acting with delicate, active objects ➤ functioning with certain autonomy within a well-defined set of tasks ➤ taking limited organisational responsibility for one's work
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ interpreting concrete and abstract data (information and concepts) within a specific area ➤ applying reflective cognitive and productive motorical skills ➤ evaluating and integrating data and developing strategies to perform diverse tasks and solve diverse, concrete, non-familiar (but subject-specific) problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in a combination of changing contexts ➤ functioning autonomously with some initiative ➤ taking complete responsibility for one's work; evaluating and correcting one's functioning with a view to obtaining collective results

Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ expanding the information in a specific area with concrete and abstract data, or completing it with missing data; using conceptual frameworks; being aware of the scope of subject-specific knowledge ➤ applying integrated cognitive and motorical skills ➤ transferring knowledge and applying procedures flexibly and inventively for the performance of tasks for the strategic solution of concrete and abstract problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in a range of new, complex contexts ➤ functioning autonomously with initiative ➤ taking responsibility for the achievement of personal outcomes and the stimulation of collective results
Level 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ critically evaluating and combining knowledge and insights from a specific area ➤ applying complex specialised skills, linked to research results ➤ gathering and interpreting relevant data and making innovative use of selected methods and resources to solve non-familiar complex problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in complex and specialised contexts ➤ functioning with complete autonomy and considerable initiative ➤ taking shared responsibility for the definition of collective results
Level 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ integrating and reformulating knowledge and insights from a specific area or at the interface between specific areas ➤ applying complex new skills, linked to autonomous, standardised research ➤ critically evaluating and applying complex, advanced and/or innovative problem-solving techniques and methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in unpredictable, complex and specialised contexts ➤ functioning with complete autonomy and a right of decision ➤ taking final responsibility for the definition of collective outcomes
Level 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ expanding and/or redefining existing knowledge from a substantial part of a specific area or at the interface between different areas ➤ interpreting and creating new knowledge through original research or advanced scientific study ➤ designing and executing projects which expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge, aimed at the development of new skills, techniques, applications, practices and/or materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ acting in very complex contexts with far-reaching, innovative implications ➤ taking responsibility for the development of professional practice or scientific research with a highly critical attitude and steering capacity

The Parliament Act distinguishes between *professional* and *educational qualifications*. A professional qualification is a set of competences allowing an individual to exercise a profession. Individuals may acquire professional qualifications both inside and outside education. Professional qualifications are situated on all levels of the qualifications framework, even at the highest ones. An educational qualification is a set of competences an individual needs to participate in society, to start further education and/or to exercise professional activities. An individual can only acquire an educational qualification through education and only institutions recognized by the Flemish authorities can grant certificates for these qualifications.

The alignment between professional and educational qualifications and the levels of the Flemish qualifications framework as proposed in the Parliament Act is shown below. This has to be considered as a target alignment that has not been implemented yet (see further in the next paragraph).

Qualification level	Professional qualifications	Educational qualifications
8	x	> Doctor
7	x	> Master
6	x	> Bachelor
5	x	> 1 or more level 5 recognized professional qualifications
4	x	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Final objectives of 3rd stage of general secondary education and specific final objectives general secondary education > Final objectives of 3rd stage of technical secondary education and specific final objectives 3rd stage of technical secondary education > Final objectives 3rd stage of artistic secondary education and specific final objectives 4rd stage of artistic secondary education > Final objectives of 3rd stage of technical secondary education or artistic secondary education and recognised professional qualification(s) > Final objectives of 3rd year of the 3rd stage of secondary vocational education and recognised professional qualification(s) > Final objectives supplementary general adult education and recognised professional qualification(s) > Recognised level 4 professional qualification(s)
3	x	> Final objectives 2nd year of the 3rd stage of secondary vocational education and recognised professional qualification(s)
2	x	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Final objectives adult basic education > Final objectives 2nd stage of secondary vocational education and recognised professional qualification(s)
1	x	> Final objectives primary

For higher education Flanders developed a national qualifications framework for higher education, taking into account the Dublin descriptors. The alignment of this national framework for higher education with the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area has been described and self-certified in a report of the verification committee (*see <http://www.nvao.net/nqf-fl>*). For higher education a direct link between the educational structure and the qualifications structure is therefore established. This corresponds with the European proposal to align the Dublin descriptors of the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area with the levels 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF.

“

The national framework for higher education has been self-certified to the EHEA in a report of the verification committee.

”

I.3.5 Recognition of qualifications ⁴

The Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure determines the way qualifications are recognised. A distinction has to be made between professional and educational qualifications.

I.3.5.1 Recognition of professional qualifications

Article 10 of the Parliament Act states as follows:

“The SERV shall submit professional competence profiles or competence profiles, described by means of the descriptor elements, for recognition as professional qualifications to the competent service of the Flemish Government. After obtaining advice from all the strategic advisory councils involved, the Flemish Government shall determine under what conditions and for which sectors derogations may be granted with respect to the submission of the application for recognition of competence profiles through the SERV. The derogation shall not affect the obligation to organise social consultations, on equal terms, prior to the application for recognition. Applications for recognition may be submitted permanently to the competent service of the Flemish Government.”

For the recognition of competence profiles by the Flemish Government, the following process will take place (article 11 of the Parliament Act): *“The competent service of the Flemish Government shall provide advice on the recognition, including a proposal for alignment, to the minister responsible for Training and the minister with functional responsibility for the qualification.*

“

The Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure determines the way qualifications are recognised.

”

For professional qualifications based on professional competence profiles, this advice shall be prepared by a sector-specific ad hoc committee within the competent service of the Flemish Government. This committee shall be composed as follows:

- 1. representatives of employers’ organisations and trade unions involved, appointed by the SERV;*
- 2. representatives of education providers, appointed by VLOR;*
- 3. representatives of public training providers, appointed by the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB) and the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (SYNTRA Vlaanderen);*
- 4. two independent alignment experts, appointed by the competent service of the Flemish Government.*

⁴ Qualifications have to be considered as “qualification standards” in this paragraph and not as individual qualifications, diplomas, certificates, awards, etc.

The ad hoc committee shall be composed of an equal number of representatives of employers' organisations and trade unions, on the one hand, and education and public training providers, on the other.

For professional qualifications based on competence profiles, this advice shall be prepared by a sector-specific ad hoc committee within the competent service of the Flemish Government. This committee shall be composed as follows:

- 1. representatives of the sector(s) in question, appointed by the SERV if the competence profile is submitted through the SERV. In application of the derogation as contained in article 10 of this Flemish Act, the sectors involved shall appoint their own representatives;*
- 2. representatives of education providers, appointed by VLOR;*
- 3. representatives of public training providers, appointed by the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB) and SYNTRA Vlaanderen;*
- 4. two independent alignment experts, appointed by the competent service of the Flemish Government.*

The ad hoc committee shall be composed of an equal number of representatives of the sectors, on the one hand, and of the education and public training providers, on the other."

The qualification process leads to the following results (article 12 of the Parliament Act):

"The Flemish Government shall recognise the qualification or request a correction of the alignment.

The request for correction shall be reasoned. Based on the arguments provided by the Flemish Government, new advice on the alignment shall be prepared by an especially composed, sector-specific ad hoc committee. Based on this preparation the competent service of the Flemish Government shall provide its advice on the recognition, together with a proposal for alignment.

Professional competence profiles shall be recognised as professional qualifications on the joint proposal of the minister responsible for Training, the minister responsible for Employment and, if applicable, the minister having functional responsibility. Competence profiles shall be recognised as professional qualifications on the joint proposal of the minister responsible for Training and, if applicable, the minister having functional responsibility.

Between the date of the application for recognition and the recognition decision of the Flemish Government, and between the date of the application for recognition and the request for correction, no more than ten weeks shall elapse. Between the date of the request for correction and the final decision, no more than eight weeks shall elapse. These periods shall be interrupted during autumn, Christmas, spring and Easter breaks and during the summer recess of the Flemish Government in July and August."

The recognised professional qualification, with the corresponding competences will be registered in a qualifications database.

As described above the Parliament Act contains the general principles regarding the procedures to recognise professional qualifications. The concrete procedures and methods however to describe and align professional qualifications have to be defined in an implementation decree as mentioned by article 7 of the Parliament Act. The Act states that this procedure shall contain at least the following elements:

- a) the model for the description of the competence profiles and the professional competence profiles, using the descriptor elements;
 - ◆ the limited examination of the competence profiles and the professional competence profiles against the model
 - ◆ the methodology for determining the level of professional qualifications, in particular for the assignment of a level to competences, the assignment of relative importance to these competences and the determination of the level of professional qualifications based on a decision-making process which leads to consensus
 - ◆ the limited examination of the activities of the sector-specific ad hoc committees against the alignment procedure and the use of the descriptor elements
- b) the way in which the competent service of the Flemish Government shall formulate an alignment proposal in the absence of consensus within the sector-specific ad hoc committee, taking into account the elements listed under a).

Discussions between different stakeholders (representing the policy domains Education and Training and Work and Social Economy) are going on due to a number of issues that need clarification and consensus.

In January 2011 an agreement was reached between the Flemish Minister of Education, the Flemish Minister of Work and the SERV social partners on the general principles regarding a partial review of the Act of parliament. In particular, principles and solutions were elaborated regarding the ways to actually submit and to identify professional qualifications and their alignment with the levels of the FQF. The appropriate responsibilities of the different actors were established. The agreement will be translated in legislative documents in the months to come.

“ In January 2011 the Flemish social partners reached a first agreement on the general principles regarding a refinement of the Act of parliament. ”

I.3.5.2 Recognition of educational qualifications

The educational qualifications are based on the learning outcomes that are determined per educational level. The Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure makes a distinction between the procedures for recognition that apply to the levels 1 to 5 on one hand and to the levels 6 to 8 on the other hand.

LEVELS 1 TO 5

According to the Parliament Act an educational qualification of level 1 - 5 is described in terms of final objectives, specific final objectives or recognised professional qualifications. The act describes 'types' of educational qualifications, being predefined (combinations of) final objectives, specific final objectives and recognised professional qualifications that concrete educational qualifications have to comply with. Each of the combinations is aligned with a certain qualification level. For example, qualification level 3 is aligned with the final objectives of the 2nd year of the 3rd stage of secondary vocational education and recognised professional qualification(s). The alignment of educational qualifications to qualification levels as mentioned in the table on page 36 is currently based on the existing situation concerning education levels, learning outcomes, etc. The alignment has been determined by educational experts, who have a clear view on the learning outcomes of each education level.

The content of the Parliament Act implies that the type of educational qualification and the alignment with the qualification level is determined but not the content of the final objectives. The final objectives that have to be reached in order to achieve a certain education level are developed by commissions (consisting of school principals, teachers, experts, ...) that are coordinated by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training. They are submitted for advice to the Flemish Education Council (**VLOR**) and have to be approved by the Flemish Parliament.

The current alignment between final objectives and the levels of the qualification framework has to be considered as a target model. The Parliament Act is currently not yet implemented. This means that the current content of the final objectives per educational level do not necessarily completely match with the level they are aligned with. After the implementation of this Act of parliament, final objectives will have to be described according to the level descriptors of the reference framework (see art. 22). During the next revision of the final objectives or when formulating new final objectives, level descriptor and level descriptor elements will be used as a reference for the description of final objectives or specific final objectives. This means that in the future the educational structure and the qualifications structure will be further aligned.

The Flemish Government can update the educational qualifications on its own initiative or at any interested party's request, taking into account the following criteria (article 15 of the Parliament Act):

- “social, economic or cultural need;
- the educational and pedagogical context: adapted to the target group, the profile of the type and level of education, stimulation of learning motivation;
- the expected inflow and outflow;
- the available material and financial resources and expertise;
- the possibility of collaboration with other institutions or the labour market/the world of business, if required;
- continuity in studies and career: coordination with the existing educational provision, coordination with follow-up courses and/or employment opportunities.”

All proposals and requests have to be submitted to VLOR for advice by the competent service of the Flemish Government. The Flemish Government shall recognise the educational qualifications on the joint proposal of the minister responsible for Training and the minister responsible for Education.

LEVELS 6 TO 8

With regard to the levels 6 to 8, higher education institutions have to jointly describe the subject-specific learning outcomes for the higher education courses (Article 5bis of the Flemish Act of 30 April 2004 on flexible learning in higher education in Flanders). The process continues as follows (articles 17 and 18 of the Parliament Act):

“The validated descriptions of the subject-specific learning outcomes shall automatically be recognised as qualifications. The validated descriptions of the courses leading to the bachelor’s degree shall be included as level 6 qualifications, those leading to the master’s degree shall be included as level 7 qualifications and those leading to the doctor’s degree shall be included as level 8 qualifications. NVAO shall submit the recognised qualifications, with the corresponding competences, to the competent service of the Flemish Government for their registration in a qualifications database.”

This means that the subject-specific learning outcomes and the link with the qualification level will be validated autonomously by the NVAO in the future without intervention of the Flemish government. Up to and including academic year 2017-2018, the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure has included a specific arrangement stating that the learning outcomes included in the reference frameworks of the external review reports of the educational programmes included in the Higher Education Register, shall automatically be recognised as a qualification and be registered in a qualifications database, with a special arrangement for those programmes for which the accreditation periods end from 2013-2014 on.

The recently approved Parliament Act on Education XX (published on 31 August 2010) changed article 17 of the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure. In stead of *“those leading to the doctor’s degree shall be included as level 8 qualifications”* the new text states: *“For the degree of doctor the level descriptor of article 58, §2, 4° of the Parliament Act on Higher Education of 4 April 2003 in Flanders is included as level 8 qualification”*.

PART TWO:

**REFERENCING THE FLEMISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK
TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

PART TWO: REFERENCING THE FLEMISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

In the first part of this report the current situation regarding the Flemish qualifications framework is explained, preceded by an overview of the current Flemish education and training system. In the second part the referencing criteria will be treated. For each criterion a description of initiatives already undertaken and/or planned in the near future is included. *The current Flemish situation, namely the fact that a Flemish qualifications framework is approved but not yet implemented, has been taken into account in the answers to the referencing criteria.*

II.1 The referencing criteria

As the European member states are expected to align their national qualifications levels to the EQF by 2010, the EQF Advisory Group has agreed on a set of criteria and procedures to guide this process. Their aim is to support the member states in meeting the deadline and to ensure that the referencing process is designed in such a way that it can be understood and trusted by stakeholders in all countries involved. By using these criteria the information and documentation will be relevant, transparent and can be compared between different member states. Below, you will find the 10 referencing criteria.

1.	➤ The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.
2.	➤ There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.
3.	➤ The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.
4.	➤ The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.
5.	➤ The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer (s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).
6.	➤ The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.
7.	➤ The referencing process shall involve international experts.
8.	➤ The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.
9.	➤ The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.
10.	➤ Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

II.2 Criterion 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

In 2009 the Flemish Government created the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (**Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming – AKOV**). The Implementation decree of the Flemish Government regarding the establishment of an internal autonomous Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training is published on 24th April 2009.

Within the agency a number of existing tasks with regard to quality assurance in education and training (e.g. tasks of the inspectorate) and new tasks were joined. The mission of the agency is defined as follows (cf. decree): *“The mission of the agency is to realise a quality assurance system for education, vocational education and training programmes and for the pathways for the recognition of acquired competences that lead towards proofs of recognised qualifications by:*

- *Developing final objectives for education, vocational education, training programmes and pathways for the recognition of acquired competences*
- *Assuring the quality of institutions that organise such programmes*
- *Ensuring clear and transparent processes of certification”*

With the implementation decree of 22nd October 2009 regarding the transfer of personnel to the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training and regarding the modification of delegations to civil servants of the Flemish Ministry for Education and Training the new agency became operational.

AKOV is appointed as the national coordination point for the European qualifications framework and therefore also for the referencing process. The agency is responsible to initiate and coordinate the process to reference the Flemish qualifications framework.

To ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the process, AKOV created an expert committee that guides and monitors the referencing process. In this expert committee experts of the following organisations were represented:

“ To ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the process, AKOV created an expert committee that guides and monitors the referencing process. ”

- Department of Education and Training;
- Department of Work and Economy;
- the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB);
- The Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (SYNTRA);
- Flanders Social and Economic Council (SERV);
- the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO);
- the Flemish Education Council (VLOR);
- two international experts;
- a representative of the French Community and a representative of the German-speaking Community in Belgium.

An external consultant was appointed to support AKOV with the report writing. The expert committee reviewed the referencing report and agreed with it.

II.3 Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

II.3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the actual comparison between the European qualifications framework and the Flemish qualifications framework is made. The objective of this exercise is to establish the correspondence between the qualifications levels in FQF and the level descriptors of the EQF. In this regard, the concept of “best fit” has to be taken into account. This means that a perfect fit between two sets of qualification levels is probably not possible and some judgement or approximation is necessary to be able to draw conclusions regarding their alignment. A level from one framework will be referenced to the level of the other framework that best matches.

The approach we used to compare the EQF with the FQF consists of the following elements:

- First, a *general comparison* between the two frameworks and the purposes for which they were designed will be made. Elements such as the structure of the frameworks, the basic principles and the way levels are described will be analysed.
- Secondly, a more detailed analysis based on a *direct, linguistic comparison* of the level descriptors of both frameworks is carried out. In this analysis we will compare the relation between level descriptors in both frameworks and the way they evolve as well.

General comparison

In Flanders no generic qualifications framework (apart from higher education) existed before the development of the *Flemish qualifications framework*. It is therefore the first attempt to create a generic, comprehensive framework that allows determining the level of a qualification, without regard to the way the competences were acquired. The Flemish qualifications framework aims at:

- An overarching classification of qualifications
- Clarity in qualifications and the way they are related to each other
- A better communication about qualifications between different actors, more precisely between the educational area and the professional area

The FQF wants to clarify what competences can be expected from a person having achieved a certain qualification. Besides that it determines what competences a person should possess to start a profession, a social function or an educational programme. The Flemish qualifications framework will support the choice of study or profession and career development of individuals. It shows the different destinations that people can reach through competence development.

The creation of the FQF is an important step in the further alignment of the areas of education and work. It allows expressing the needs of the labour market in terms of qualifications and competences instead of required diplomas or education. Education and training providers on the other hand will start from the qualifications framework to develop educational and training programmes that lead towards the qualifications that the labour market is asking for. In this way, it facilitates life long learning.

The *European Qualifications Framework* (EQF) is a common European reference framework which allows comparing countries qualifications systems. It serves as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.

Although both the FQF as the EQF are qualifications frameworks and show *similarities*, a number of important *differences* can be identified.

The Flemish qualifications framework is an instrument to determine the qualifications an individual can acquire and to align the learning outcomes concerned. The EQF on the other hand has to be considered as a "meta-framework", intended to function as a translation device to allow comparisons between frameworks.

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The Flemish qualifications framework is an instrument to determine the qualifications an individual can acquire and to align the set of learning outcomes concerned. The EQF on the other hand has to be considered as a "meta-framework"

”

In the basic principles that are the fundamentals of each framework, we see a number of similarities:

- Both frameworks are based on the concept of learning outcomes.
- Each framework has a hierarchical structure meaning that each level builds upon the underlying level.
- Both frameworks are comprehensive, incorporating qualifications from all kinds of learning experiences, whether acquired through formal, non-formal or informal processes, or through general education, VET or higher education programmes.
- In both frameworks, the statements that define the levels are completely neutral in terms of field(s) of learning.

As stated above, both frameworks are based on the concept of learning outcomes. They both make use of 8 level descriptors to describe qualifications and the relation between them. Each level descriptor is based on several descriptor elements that contain aspects of knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy. The way these descriptor elements are composed and defined however is different between both frameworks. The FQF makes use of **five descriptor** elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. The EQF only use three descriptor elements: knowledge, skills and competence. Similarities and differences in the way these elements have to be interpreted are shown below.

	FQF	EQF
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Environment context: the circumstances in which the knowledge and skills have to be used. » Action context: aspects such as working with people or with machines, working with fragile or valuable products 	
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Declarative knowledge: events, facts, concepts, conceptual frameworks, principles and theories » Procedural knowledge: heuristics/rules of thinking, techniques, methods, procedures and strategies in a certain (part of an) area of knowledge and the level to what extent the knowledge is mastered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The ability to effectively and efficiently use the acquired knowledge. The Flemish qualifications framework makes a distinction in its description of skills between motorical skills and cognitive skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).
Competence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The possibility to take decisions 	
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The obligation to ensure that something functions well and the willingness to assume accountability for that 	

With regard to the definitions above, we want to stress that the definitions are not included in the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure. They are mentioned in the explanatory document accompanying the Act (*Memorie van Toelichting*).

The table shows that the FQF uses a more extended definition of knowledge than the EQF. Both definitions however mention elements regarding factual aspects on the one hand (events, facts, theories, ...) and more practical knowledge (techniques, methods, practices) on the other hand. In both frameworks the basic definition of skills seems to be the same, in both cases skills are interpreted as “the ability to use knowledge”.

In the EQF the term “skills” is further detailed in cognitive and practical aspects. The FQF does not make this distinction in the definition of skills, but uses two different concepts in the description of the level descriptors: cognitive and motorical skills. The content of motorical and practical skills is similar: EQF’s practical skills mention “manual dexterity” and FQF’s motorical skills refer to practical, technical aspects. The FQF does not use the term “competence” as a separate descriptor element. The FQF defines competence as follows: “the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes when performing social activities, and integrate these into one’s actions” (see definition in the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure). The FQF considers competence and learning outcome as interchangeable terms. The EQF on the other hand uses a specific definition for competence; it is defined as a combination of autonomy and responsibility. These two terms are included as separate descriptor elements in the FQF.

We can conclude that the definitions of knowledge and skills are comparable in both frameworks. Competence, used in the EQF, is a consolidated concept that includes the elements responsibility and autonomy that are included as separate descriptor elements in the FQF.

The main difference between both frameworks is the element “context” that is included in the FQF as a separate descriptor element and therefore strongly emphasized. The context in which an individual is able to function is a clear element of a qualification in the FQF, but not so explicit in the EQF. Because of the different purposes of the FQF and the EQF this seems logical. The FQF is a national framework that is used to determine the qualifications and their level. In this regard the context is more relevant for a national framework than for a European meta-framework that aims at comparing frameworks that are used in different contexts.

“ The main difference between both frameworks is the element “context” that is included in the FQF as a separate descriptor element and therefore strongly emphasized. ”

Finally, we found a number of differences in the way the level descriptors are formulated:

- **Degree of detail:** The level descriptions are more elaborated in the FQF than in the EQF, mainly for the lower levels. FQF tries to describe terms such as “basic knowledge” and “basic skills” more concretely, which facilitates the process of aligning of learning outcomes.

- **Use of verbs:** In the FQF in each level descriptor a verb is used. In the EQF this is only the case for the description of competences. The use of active verbs renders the descriptions more person-oriented. Moreover, these descriptions seem to be more behaviour-related, again focussing on qualifications that an individual can acquire.
- **Explicit mentioning of work or study:** Although the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure explicitly distinguishes between educational and professional qualifications, these different learning paths are not explicitly mentioned in the level descriptors. The FQF refers to areas, rather to be interpreted as fields, domains, sectors, etc. The EQF on the other hand consistently refers to “field of work or study” and therefore mentions explicitly both possible learning paths in the level descriptors.

II.3.3 Direct comparison

In this paragraph a direct comparison of the level descriptors of the Flemish qualifications framework and the European qualifications framework is carried out. This comprises a linguistic analysis of both level descriptors and qualitative assessment of the comparability of qualification levels. Although the intermediate conclusions are formulated for two levels, the comparison has been carried out for the two frameworks as a whole, taking into account all the lower and higher levels. These comparisons are included in the analysis following each level’s table.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 1		
	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	➤ Basic general knowledge	➤ Recognising materials, concise, unambiguous information and simple, concrete basic concepts and rules of a part of a specific area.
Skills	➤ Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Applying one or more of the following skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Cognitive skills: retrieving information from one’s memory, remembering and applying it » Motorical skills: using automatisms and imitating practical actions ➤ Performing repetitive and recognisable actions in routine tasks
Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	➤ Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acting in a stable, familiar, simple and well-structured context, in which time pressure is of little importance ➤ Acting with non-delicate objects ➤ Functioning under direct supervision ➤ Showing personal effectiveness

The EQF and the FQF both mention the need for basic knowledge of a person achieving level 1. However, the FQF describes this knowledge more concretely than the EQF and refers to materials, concepts and rules. An important difference is the fact that in the EQF knowledge is considered as being general, whereas the FQF limits it to “a part of a specific area”. In the EQF basis knowledge of a certain area appears in level 2.

Skills are more thoroughly determined in the FQF, making a distinction between cognitive and motorical skills. The FQF moreover emphasizes aspects of repetition and routine, the EQF on the other hand mentions “simple tasks”. The term “routine tasks” is used by the EQF in level 2. As an opposite of complex tasks, we consider simple and routine tasks as being interchangeable concepts.

Both frameworks expect people to function “under direct supervision”, having little autonomy. The context that is related to this level is in both frameworks described as a “structured context”, the FQF adds some characteristics such as stable, familiar and simple.

By adding “showing personal effectiveness” the FQF seems to determine slightly higher expectations towards a level 1 qualification than the EQF. The FQF clearly refers to a certain level of responsibility here, whereas the EQF does not mention this.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 2		
	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding information, concrete concepts and standard procedures within a specific area
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying one or more of the following skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive skills: analysing information by distinguishing and relating elements Motorical skills: Transforming sensory perceptions into motorical actions Performing acquired practical-technical actions Applying a selected number of standard procedures when performing tasks; applying prescribed strategies to solve a limited number of concrete, recognisable problems
Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work or study under supervision with some autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting in a limited number of comparable, simple, familiar contexts Acting with delicate, passive objects Functioning under supervision with limited autonomy Take limited executive responsibility for one’s work

In level 2 both frameworks limit the field of knowledge to a specific area. As for level 1, the description of knowledge is slightly more detailed in the FQF. The FQF moreover adds a verb which allows making a more clear distinction with level 1. Level 1 only required to “recognise” information, concepts, etc. while level 2 supposes that the individual also understands the information.

As from level 2, both frameworks introduce a problem-solving ability, limiting it both to “routine” (EQF) or “concrete, recognisable” problems (FQF). To do this, people will have to be able to use “**simple rules and tools**” according to EQF, whereas the FQF mentions “**prescribed strategies**”. The FQF emphasizes the fact that the methods used exist and are accepted as being adequate, the EQF on the other hand focuses on the complexity of the methods. This means that both frameworks do not expect a lot of interpretation or innovation by the individual in choosing the methods. In line with the FQF, the EQF starts

to subdivide skills as from level 2 in cognitive and practical (FQF: “motorical”) skills, but does not describe them in more detail as the FQF does.

With regard to autonomy, both frameworks agree that people achieving a qualification of level 2, should be able to function under supervision, with limited autonomy.

Besides the elements mentioned above, the FQF adds some more descriptive aspects. For example, an aspect which is not mentioned by the EQF is the ability to ‘*analyse information by distinguishing and relating elements*’. Furthermore, according to the FQF limited responsibility is expected, whereas the EQF does not mention anything about responsibility. The EQF starts using the concept of responsibility explicitly as from level 3.

After having analysed the levels 1 and 2, it seemed that the description of knowledge of level 1 of the FQF rather corresponds with level 2 of the EQF. On the other hand both frameworks introduce a problem-solving ability and some level of autonomy as from level 2. If we take into account the complete level description, we therefore conclude that level 1 of the FQF aligns with level 1 of the EQF and that the levels 2 in both frameworks are aligned as well.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 3		
	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding a number of abstract concepts, laws, formulas and methods within a specific area; distinguishing between major and minor issues in information Applying one or more of the following skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive skills: Analysing information using deduction and induction Synthesizing information Motorical skills: Making constructions based on a plan Performing actions which require tactical and strategic insight Applying artistic-creative skills Choosing, combining and applying standard procedures and methods to perform tasks and solve a variety of well-defined, concrete problems
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information 	

Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study ➤ Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acting in comparable contexts in which a number of factors change ➤ Acting with delicate, active objects ➤ Functioning with certain autonomy within a well-defined set of tasks ➤ Taking limited organisational responsibility for one's work
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Concerning knowledge, the FQF sets higher expectations toward individuals than the EQF by introducing the term “abstract concepts”. The FQF moreover mentions the ability to “distinguish major and minor issues”, to analyse information “using deduction and induction” and to synthesize information. The EQF on the other hand, only mentions knowledge of “facts, principles, processes and general concepts” and therefore requires a lower level of knowledge.

At level 3, both frameworks expect an individual having the ability to select adequate methods for problem-solving. The solutions that one chooses remain in both frameworks limited to basic or standard methods.

The EQF introduces the concept of “responsibility” as from level 3, whereas the FQF already mentioned it in the levels 1 and 2. By referring to “responsibility for completion of tasks”, the level of responsibility of the EQF in the qualifications level 3 is more aligned with level 3 of the FQF than with level 2. Level 2 of the FQF mentions “take limited executive responsibility” whereas level 3 states that people have to organise themselves to perform their work, “organisational responsibility”. Both frameworks include an aspect of taking responsibility to reach an end result instead of only being responsible for execution (in that case the EQF would rather have mentioned: “responsibility for execution/performing of tasks”).

Both frameworks refer to the ability of a person to function in a changing context. According to EQF, a person should be capable to “adapt his/her behaviour to the circumstances”. FQF agrees in this matter by mentioning that the learner has to show that he or she can act in a comparable but possibly changed context. The description in the EQF is a more proactive however. The FQF on the other hand explicitly mentions a degree of autonomy, relating to this element of proactive behaviour in the EQF.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 4		
	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interpreting concrete and abstract data (information and concepts) within a specific area
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Applying reflective cognitive and productive motorical skills ➤ Evaluating and integrating data and developing strategies to perform diverse tasks and solve diverse, concrete, non-familiar (but subject-specific) problems
Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change ➤ Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acting in a combination of changing contexts ➤ Functioning autonomously with some initiative ➤ Taking complete responsibility for one's work; evaluating and correcting one's functioning with a view to obtaining collective results

Concerning knowledge, the EQF introduces the concept of “theoretical knowledge” in level 4. The FQF already mentioned abstract knowledge in level 3. We can consider both concepts as being interchangeable terms, both requiring the ability to handle conceptual, non-concrete information. By using the verb “interpreting”, the FQF adds another level of difficulty in comparison with level 3.

Both frameworks limit the problem-solving ability to problems in a specific context. With regard to the kind of problems, the FQF uses a broader definition (“diverse, non-familiar”) than the EQF (“specific”).

Whereas the FQF already introduced the term “autonomy”, the EQF does not use this description. The EQF mentions “self-management” instead. A person with a level 4 qualification, according to the EQF or FQF, has to be able to function autonomously to a certain degree within a context that may be subject to change.

The EQF and the FQF both stress the need to take responsibility for one's own and for evaluating and improving it. Besides that, the EQF explicitly mentions the supervision of others, putting the focus is no longer exclusively on the individual. In the FQF, supervision is not mentioned as such. The fact that “collective results” are included in the description refers to an aspect of team work. By adding the verb “stimulating” the FQF also seems to refer to aspects of supervising instead of just participating as a team member.

After having analysed the levels 3 and 4, we found that:

- The concept of abstraction is introduced by the FQF in level 3 and by the EQF in level 4
- Both frameworks are aligned with regard to the degree of autonomy and responsibility of the levels 3 and 4
- Both frameworks introduce elements of supervision and evaluation and improvement of a person's own work as from level 4

Taking into account these conclusions, we conclude that the levels 3 are aligned in the FQF and EQF and we consider the levels 4 as being aligned in both frameworks as well.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 5		
	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Expanding the information in a specific area with concrete and abstract data, or completing it with missing data; using conceptual frameworks; being aware of the scope of subject-specific knowledge
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Applying integrated cognitive and motorical skills ➤ Transferring knowledge and applying procedures flexibly and inventively for the performance of tasks and for the strategic solution of concrete
Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change ➤ Review and develop performance of self and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acting in a range of new, complex contexts ➤ Functioning autonomously with initiative ➤ Taking responsibility for the achievement of personal outcomes and the stimulation of collective results

In level 5, both frameworks introduce the fact that the involved person is aware of the scope (FQF) or in other words boundaries (EQF) of subject-specific knowledge. The FQF reinforces this aspect by using the verbs “expanding” and “completing” of knowledge, adding a more proactive element to it than the EQF.

Concerning cognitive and practical (or motorical) skills, both frameworks introduce the ability to solve abstract problems. In this regard, both agree that “creative” (EQF) or “inventive” skills are necessary. The FQF adds an element regarding the impact (on the longer term) of the solutions by mentioning “strategic” solutions.

At each level both frameworks indicate a more complex context. At level 5, EQF mentions an “unpredictable context”. FQF mentions “a range of new, complex contexts” but does not use the word “unpredictable” until level 7. Both frameworks introduce performance responsibility as from level 5, both on an individual and collective level. The responsibility for the performance of others seems to be larger in the EQF mentioning “develop performance of others” which goes one step further than “stimulating” in the FQF (less

result-oriented).

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 6		
	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically evaluating and combining knowledge and insights from a specific area
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying complex specialised skills, linked to research results Gathering and interpreting relevant data and making innovative use of selected methods and resources to solve non-familiar complex problems
Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting in complex and specialised contexts Functioning with complete autonomy and considerable initiative Taking shared responsibility for the definition of collective results

At level 6 EQF and FQF stress a critical approach of knowledge, still remaining limited in both frameworks to a specific area. Both frameworks have left the distinction between cognitive and practical/motorical skills, still mentioned in level 5. For both the EQF and the FQF, skills become more advanced and specialised and an individual should demonstrate innovation while solving complex problems. At this level, both frameworks agree that the complex problems can be non-familiar/unpredictable. The FQF links the use of complex and specialised skills to research results, whereas the EQF mentions does not mention this. Referrals to research are limited to the use of research results in level 6. As from level 7 both frameworks consider the use of skills to be able to perform research activities as one of the characteristics of this qualification level.

The context descriptions in both frameworks remain slightly different, the EQF emphasizing an element of “unpredictability” and the FQF limiting it to “complex and specialised contexts”. As mentioned before, the FQF only introduces unpredictability as from level 7.

With regard to the description of responsibility levels, some differences occur. The EQF mentions “responsibility for decision-making”, the FQF refers to “right of decision” as from level 7. On the other hand the FQF has included explicit elements of autonomy and initiative in level 6. By mentioning “complete autonomy”, one can suppose an underlying meaning of the ability and responsibility for decision taking. Furthermore, the responsibility for others seems to be slightly different. Firstly, the EQF focuses on the “development” of others while the FQF stresses the “results”. The EQF goes beyond results and performance (mentioned in level 5) and sees a different role for individuals acquiring level 6, focussing on helping others to develop their competences. The expectations of

the Flemish framework concerning managing others are less clear. The FQF does describe the need to be able to take “shared responsibility for the definition of collective results”. Shared responsibility seems to be rather referring to team work than the development of others. The introduction of the word “group” in the EQF aligns with this collective focus.

After having analysed the levels 5 and 6, we conclude that:

- Both levels 5 introduce an awareness of the boundaries of subject-specific knowledge and the ability to solve abstract problems, requiring creative/inventive skills
- A distinction between cognitive and practical/motorical skills is used by both frameworks up until level 5
- Unpredictability of the context is introduced by EQF at level 5, while FQF only mentions it at level 7 (defining the context in level 5 as “new and complex”)
- Both frameworks introduce performance responsibility at level 5
- Both frameworks introduce elements of criticism with regard to knowledge and problem-solving of unexpected/non-familiar problems at level 6
- Levels of autonomy and responsibility are aligned between both frameworks at level 6, only making a difference in the use of this responsibility (development-oriented in the EQF, result-oriented in the FQF)

A remarkable difference between both frameworks is the referral to the ability to use research results in level 6 of the FQF, which is not the case in the EQF. Considering that a large number of other level descriptors elements correspond with each other, we still consider both levels as being aligned. Based on the conclusions above-mentioned, we consider the levels 5 as being aligned as well.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 7

	EQF	FQF
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating and reformulating knowledge and insights from a specific area or at the interface between different areas Applying complex new skills, linked to autonomous, standardised research
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically evaluating and applying complex, advanced and/or innovative problem-solving techniques and methods
Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/ or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting in unpredictable, complex and specialised contexts Functioning with complete autonomy and a right of decision Taking final responsibility for the definition of collective outcomes

At level 7, knowledge is being integrated from different fields in both frameworks and thus supposes an interface with different areas in the EQF as well as in the FQF. This time, the EQF is more specific about the type of knowledge, describing it as “highly specialised knowledge”, “at the forefront of knowledge”. Both frameworks mention research, which requires specialised (EQF) and innovative (EQF and FQF) problem-solving skills. Since the 7th level corresponds, in higher education, with a master’s degree in both frameworks, the link with research in both cases is clear. The EQF however seems to refer to a higher level of skills mentioning “to develop new knowledge and procedures” while the FQF only mentions “integrating and reformulating knowledge” (new knowledge is introduced in level 8). The FQF starts from existing knowledge whereas in the EQF one should be able to develop new knowledge from scratch.

From this level on, the context becomes unpredictable according to the FQF, where the EQF mentioned this already as from level 5. The FQF increases the amount of responsibility to the “right of decision” and ‘taking final responsibility for the definition of collective outcomes’ instead of “shared responsibility”. In the European framework responsibilities focus on the “contribution to professional knowledge and practice”, while the FQF continues to link responsibility to results, going one step further than level 6 by mentioning outcomes (effects) instead of direct results.

The EQF reintroduces a performance responsibility (not mentioning it in level 6), but keeps developmental element (cf. focus of level 6) by defining a responsibility “for contributing to professional knowledge and practice”. This aspect of development cannot be found in the FQF.

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR LEVEL 8

	EQF	FQF
<i>Knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding and/or redefining existing knowledge from a substantial part of a specific area or at the interface between different areas
<i>Skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpreting and creating new knowledge through original research or advanced scientific study Designing and executing projects which expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge, aimed at the development of new skills, techniques, applications, practices and/or materials
<i>Competence/ Context, Autonomy, Responsibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting in very complex contexts with far-reaching, innovative implications Taking responsibility for the development of professional practice or scientific research with a highly critical attitude and steering capacity

Both frameworks repeat that the knowledge area can be situated at the interface between fields, already introduced in level 7. A new element with regard to knowledge is the fact that both frameworks introduce the extension and redefinition of existing knowledge and practices. This means that new knowledge is developed, what was already included in level 7 of the EQF. In level 7 however the methods were limited to integrating knowledge.

In line with a doctoral degree that corresponds with this level, both frameworks continue to mention elements such as research (broadening it to “study contexts including research” according to the EQF and “scientific study” in the FQF) and innovation, both also focus on an advanced skill level.

A new element that is introduced is “professional integrity”, it is only mentioned by the EQF. The FQF refers to a “highly critical attitude”, which aligns with integrity. Another new aspect is “authority”, again only mentioned by the EQF. We consider “steering capacity” included in the FQF as having the same meaning. Both refer to the fact of being considered as a reference in an area and having impact of influence as a consequence in the area concerned.

After having analysed the levels 7 and 8, we found that:

- Referrals to research and innovation are strongly emphasized as from level 7 in both frameworks
- Both frameworks refer to unpredictable contexts as from level 7
- Level 8 introduces the following concepts in both frameworks: authority/steering capacity, integrity/highly critical attitude
- Both levels 8 refer to redefining and extending existing knowledge and practices
- The concept of “new knowledge” is introduced by EQF at level 7 and by FQF at level 8

As with regard to the levels 7 and 8, a number of important new elements are introduced at the same level in the EQF and the FQF and the descriptor elements do not show any crucial differences, we conclude that the levels 7 of both frameworks and the levels 8 of the EQF and the FQF are aligned.

II.3.4 Conclusions

The EQF and the FQF have been designed for different purposes what results in a number of differences between both frameworks, for instance:

- The FQF describes the level descriptors more detailed
- The FQF uses more verbs in its level descriptors what shows i.a. that it is more individual-oriented
- Etc.

On the other hand both frameworks show an important number of similarities, such as the use of learning outcomes, the use of elements of knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility in the level descriptors, a structure based on 8 levels, etc.

To be able to evaluate the alignment of both frameworks, we performed a direct comparison of the level descriptors in this chapter. We used the “best-fit” principle for this comparison, meaning that a level of one framework is aligned with the level of the other framework that best matches the level description. This means that for each level descriptor a generic evaluation has been made, not focussing on the comparability of one descriptor element (e.g. skills) but on the complete level descriptor.

The direct comparison showed a number of differences in focus between both frameworks, the most important ones being:

- The FQF sets some higher requirements with regard to knowledge in the lowest levels, introducing knowledge about a specific area as from level 1 (EQF only mentions basic, general knowledge) and mentioning aspects of abstraction as from level 2 (not the case for the FQF)

- Another difference concerns responsibility, whereas both the EQF and the FQF refer to responsibility for results, the EQF emphasizes more the fact that one is also responsible for the development of others and contribution to practice development

These differences in undertone were not crucial enough to have an impact on the overall conclusion with regard to the alignment of a whole level descriptor.

As already indicated in the intermediate conclusions in the previous paragraph, we therefore conclude that the levels of the FQF and the EQF are aligned as follows:

<i>EQF</i>	<i>FQF</i>
Level 1	Level 1
Level 2	Level 2
Level 3	Level 3
Level 4	Level 4
Level 5	Level 5
Level 6	Level 6
Level 7	Level 7
Level 8	Level 8

Taking into account that the EQF and the FQF have different purposes and the FQF (as is the case for all national frameworks) is more detailed than the EQF, this means that each level descriptor of the FQF contains at least a core that corresponds with the EQF level descriptor at the same level.

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Each level descriptor of the FQF contains at least a core that corresponds with the EQF level descriptor at the same level.

”

II.4 Criterion 3

The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.

II.4.1 Principle and objective of learning outcomes

Within the Flemish qualification structure, two concepts are used which are mutually exchangeable: learning outcomes and competences. Learning outcomes and competences are the result of a learning process that can occur in several situations (not only in an educational context).

Learning outcomes can be described as follows: *“Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes must be accompanied by appropriate assessment criteria which can be used to judge that the expected learning outcomes have been achieved.”* (Gonzalez J., Wagenaar R.)

The definition of competence that is used in the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure is the following: *“the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes when performing social activities, and integrate these into one’s actions. In higher education competences are called subject-specific learning outcomes”.*

Learning outcomes refer to applying what one has learned in concrete situations. It focuses not only on “knowing”, but also on “being able” and “doing”. In that respect, learning outcomes as well as competences result into observable behaviour that thus can be evaluated.

The Flemish Act of 30 April 2009 on the Qualifications Structure confirms that the Flemish qualifications structure is based on competences: *“The qualifications framework distinguishes between eight levels, ranging from level 1 to level 8. Each level within the framework is described by means of a level descriptor. A level descriptor offers a generic description of the characteristics of the competences typical for the qualifications at that level, and consists of five descriptor elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility.”*

The Flemish qualifications framework makes an explicit distinction between **educational** (complete and aligned sets of competences which are necessary to function and participate in society, with which further studies in secondary or higher education can be undertaken or professional activities can be performed) and **professional qualifications** (aligned set of competences with which a profession can be exercised).

Competences that are required for different types of professions are described in professional competence profiles, and as a result they constitute the set of “learning outcomes” of the professional qualifications. The SERV (Flanders Social and Economic Council) is responsible for the development of professional competence profiles, in close collaboration with professional sectors. The Parliament Act of the Flemish qualifications structure defines the procedures to **recognise professional qualifications**, based on these competences (see paragraph I.1.3.5).

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The Parliament Act of the Flemish qualifications structure defines the procedures to recognise professional qualifications, based on competences.

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Educational qualifications are typically the result of having successfully completed an educational programme. They are in most cases confirmed by a diploma, certificate, etc. Educational qualifications are determined in four ways: (1) general learning outcomes together with professional qualification(s), (2) general learning outcomes together with specific learning outcomes, (3) final objectives and (4) one or more professional qualifications. In elementary and secondary education the concept of **final objectives** has been introduced in the mid-90's. Final objectives are learning outcomes that indicate the minimum knowledge and ability that a pupil or student has to have acquired after successfully finalising a certain learning programme.

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Final objectives are learning outcomes that indicate the minimum knowledge and ability that a pupil or student has to have acquired after successfully finalising a certain learning programme.

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Final objectives include objectives regarding knowledge, skills and attitudes.

For **higher education** the concept of learning outcomes has been introduced by the **Dublin descriptors** (initiated by Flanders and the Netherlands). The Dublin descriptors are formalised in Flemish law by the Parliament Act on Higher Education dd. 4 April 2003. Only for the short cycle, FQF's level 5 descriptors have been introduced in the same law. The Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure determines that institutions for higher education have to **jointly describe** the subject-specific learning outcomes for higher education courses. Article 16 of the Act states that: *“Higher education institutions shall jointly describe the subject-specific learning outcomes for the higher education courses as referred to in Article 5bis of the Flemish Act of 30 April 2004 on flexible learning in higher education in Flanders and containing urgent measures for higher education.”* This Act also inserts a new article in the Parliament Act on Higher Education (article 5bis): *The institution shall describe learning outcomes for each course and for each subject. Based on the level descriptors as determined in article 58, §2 of the Flemish Act of 4 April 2003 on higher education reform, the institutions, coordinated by the Flemish Council of University Colleges and the Flemish Interuniversity Council, shall, in addition, jointly describe the subject-specific learning outcomes. They shall guarantee the application of Flemish, federal and international legislation regarding professional recognition. This description of subject-specific learning outcomes shall be validated by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders. To this end, the Flemish Government may lay down further rules.”*

The procedures to jointly determining learning outcomes in higher education are not yet formalised. VLIR and VLHORA started a pilot project to jointly determine learning outcomes by all education providers offering bachelor and master programmes in January 2010. Two areas were selected: construction (5 programmes) and communication (3 programmes). All education providers that offer programmes in these areas, have been asked to define their learning outcomes by November 2010. Currently the results of this pilot project are used to develop the future procedures.

With regard to higher education, people may also obtain the degree of Bachelor and Master if the institution deems that the persons in question have acquired the necessary competences (i.e. required learning outcomes). *'EVC'* means valorisation of acquired competences, i.e. having acquired all the knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes through learning processes without being awarded a qualification. This is the case in non-formal and informal learning (see next paragraph). *'EVK'* means recognition of acquired qualifications, i.e. each national or foreign qualification which demonstrates that the person has successfully completed a formal learning path, either or not through education. *NARIC-Flanders*, is the National Academic (& Professional) Recognition and Information Centre of Flanders within the framework of the European Commission and is also the National Information Centre of Flanders (ENIC) within the framework of the Council of Europe and UNESCO. It is in charge of the academic *recognition* of foreign higher-education degrees and the professional recognition of the professional titles regulated by the Flemish Community, i.e. for teachers (based on the prevailing European Directive ER 2005/36).

II.4.2 Validation of non-formal or informal learning

In the previous paragraph the use of learning outcomes for the development of educational qualifications is clearly demonstrated.

Professional qualifications are often not acquired through an educational programme, but through work-based learning, exercising a profession, etc. To render visible competences that people acquired through their job, voluntary work or other experiences valorise them in the labour market, a process of *"recognising acquired competences"* (validation of prior learning) has been developed in Flanders.

“ To render visible competences that people acquired through their job, voluntary work or other experiences and valorise them in the labour market, a process of recognising acquired competences has been developed in Flanders ”

The Flemish Act of 30 April 2009 on the Qualifications Structure states that the qualifications structure can be used as a reference framework for the elaboration of assessments for the recognition of acquired competences and the mutual coordination of procedures. Procedures to recognise acquired competences are organised by:

- *Higher education institutions*: Each association in higher education has elaborated "EVC" rules of procedure. The procedures result in a proof of acquired competences, either appropriate credit certificates and/or a specific degree. This procedure refers to the level descriptors included in art. 58 §2 of the Parliament Act on Higher Education and the learning outcomes laid down by the higher education institutions and their

programmers. The procedures start from a portfolio and typically include other elements such as assessments, structured interviews, behavioural observation.

- **Centres for Adult Education:** As stated in the Parliament Act on Adult Education, Centres for Adult Education can organise assessments to evaluate the competences a person acquired through formal or informal learning. The way the admission tests are organised is determined in the rules of procedure of each centre.
- **Exam Committee:** People not having obtained a diploma of secondary education can pass an exam to obtain these diplomas or a certificate through the Exam Committee (<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/secundair/examencommissie>). This is possible for each educational programme offered in secondary education (**ASO, TSO, KSO, BSO**) and nursing training (associate degree). Each year two exam periods are organised. The standards that are applied are the learning plans of the Exam Committee and the learning plans of secondary schools that are chosen by the applicants.
- **Assessment centres for certificates of work experience:** The social partners give their advice on the professions for which a certificate for work experience is relevant. It is based on the competences related to a certain profession, no matter where one has achieved those competences. Therefore, professional competence profiles are translated into standards by the SERV and the social partners. These standards are used in a test situation to assess whether people dispose of the required competences. People can demonstrate their competences in an interview or a practical test organised by assessment centres. If they pass the test, they receive a certificate for work experience, granted by the Flemish government. The certificate for work experience will be a formal proof of a professional qualification (Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure, art. 34). Tests that enable people to obtain a certificate for work experience have been developed for about 50 professions until now (**see a list on <http://www.ervaringsbewijs.be/testcentra.html>**).
- **The Flemish school for coaches** (sports) (**Vlaamse Trainersschool – VTS**): This institution (<http://www.bloso.be/vlaamsetrainersschool>) has elaborated an EVC – EVK guide that describes the procedures that apply to applicants. The procedures include interviews, mastering tests and training exercises.
- Finally, **NARIC Flanders** also provides some services on proofs of study for parts of foreign programmes (**see: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/NARIC>**).

A **knowledge network** was launched in 2009 to support the further development and application of EVC procedures (see www.evcvlaanderen.be). A number of pilot projects concerning EVC procedures are currently ongoing, for instance in tourism (EVC procedure for guide lecturers) and for civil servants of the Flemish government (development of a procedure to be able to access jobs of the Flemish government without having obtained the required diploma). The existing procedures result in a recognition of acquired competences, but are not yet linked to the Flemish qualifications framework. As the Flemish qualifications structure is not implemented yet, none of the existing EVC procedures therefore results in awarding a qualifications level to the identified competences so far.

The Flemish government intends to develop an *integrated EVC policy* that will be linked to the Flemish qualifications framework and that will make it possible to obtain a qualification by means of assessment procedures.

II.4.3 Credit systems

Higher education in Flanders is using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for quite a while now. This system for credit accumulation starts from learning outcomes. Credits in higher education give an indication of the effort or amount of work (workload) that a student has to deliver to acquire learning results. The workload is the time that the student has taken to execute all learning activities such as attending courses and seminars, completing practice and projects, self-studying and exams that are necessary to acquire and demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. The workload of one academic year is set on 60 ECTS credits. 60 credits correspond with 1500 to 1800 hours of workload. Learning outcomes that have been acquired previously can after a successful assessment or validation of the learning outcomes lead to an acquisition of the corresponding credits. Credits are referred to in Flanders as “study points”, while students who successfully complete a course or modules are awarded a credit certificate .

No credit systems have been developed for compulsory education in Flanders. Currently, no intentions are identified that would lead to such a system in the near future.

At the end of 2006 the European Commission elaborated a proposition regarding a European *Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)*. This system is also based on learning outcomes and allows to validate results of non-formal and informal learning. Member states are free to introduce this system or not. The European Commission recommends the member states to implement it by 2012. Flanders is closely following the European evolutions in this regard, but has not undertaken formal initiatives to implement the system. A consultation amongst Flemish stakeholders (advisory and consultative bodies such as VLOR and SERV, training providers, representatives of the profit sector, representatives of the social profit sector and NVAO) regarding ECVET in 2007 showed that most of the consulted organisations found that the system had potential, but remained much too vague and unclear and needed further elaboration.

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Flanders is closely following the European evolutions in regard to ECVET, but has not undertaken formal initiatives to implement the system.

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II.5 Criterion 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

As explained in paragraph I.3.5. the procedures to include professional and educational qualifications in the Flemish qualifications framework are determined in the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure.

With regard to **professional qualifications**, the SERV (Flanders Social and Economic Council) develops the professional competence profiles and submits them to AKOV. AKOV analyses the profiles and formulates an advice regarding the recognition of the qualification and the scaling (corresponding level of the Flemish qualifications framework) that is submitted to the Minister of Training and the Minister that is responsible for the policy area concerned. Moreover, for professional qualifications based on professional competence profiles, this advice shall be prepared by a sector-specific ad hoc committee. The Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure leaves a possibility to submit competence profiles through another procedure than by the SERV, but these procedures have not been defined yet due to a lack of implementation decrees.

For **educational qualifications**, the procedures to recognise qualifications are defined by the Parliament Act as well. A distinction is made between educational qualifications at levels 1 to 5 on the one hand and 5 to 8 on the other hand.

Educational qualifications from **level 1 to 5** are based on final objectives, specific objectives or professional qualifications. A detailed overview of the different levels and types of educational qualifications is included in paragraph I.3.5. If referred to final and specific final objectives, this includes the replacing final objectives or specific final objectives that have been declared equivalent for special secondary education and adult education. This also applies to professional qualifications. To recognise educational qualifications, the Parliament Act states that AKOV elaborates proposals for educational qualifications on its own initiative or at any interested party's request. All proposals and requests, converted into proposals or not, are then to be submitted to VLOR for advice. The Flemish Government will recognise the educational qualifications on the joint proposal of the minister responsible for Training and the minister responsible for Education.

Existing final and specific objectives will be reviewed in a transition period to align them with different levels of the qualifications framework.

Regarding the **levels 6 to 8**, the Parliament Act states that higher education institutions will jointly describe the subject-specific learning outcomes for the higher education courses. The validated descriptions of the subject-specific learning outcomes will automatically be recognised as qualifications. NVAO shall submit the recognised qualifications, with the corresponding competences, to AKOV for their registration in a qualifications database.

To *maximise transparency*, the Flemish Government decided (see Parliament Act) to create *two central databases*: a qualifications database and database of learning certificates and certificates for work experience.

With a view to information provision to individuals, institutions and government bodies on the Flemish qualifications policy, and with a view to policy development, all recognised qualifications will be registered in a *qualifications database* by AKOV. In this database all recognised educational and professional qualifications, with the corresponding competences, shall be documented. AKOV will be responsible for the management of the database and for the data exchange.

With a view to service provision or policy development, all certificates of learning and for work experience recognised or declared equivalent by the Flemish Community, together with minimal identification data of the holder of the certificate in question, shall be registered in a *database of learning certificates and of certificates for work experience* at the competent services of the Flemish Government.

The description of procedures and principles that are determined by the Flemish Government to recognise and register qualifications and are described above, show that the Flemish Government has a *clear intention* to create a *transparent system* in which relevant stakeholders are involved. Moreover, the qualifications structure allows to bring the worlds of learning and working together. The qualifications structure offers a common language, framework and reference that will facilitate discussions between actors with different backgrounds and objectives. Education and training providers will, starting from the same qualifications structure, develop educational and training programmes that lead to the requested qualifications. The same framework can be used to determine the needs of the labour market and educational objectives. Study choice and career development will be more consistent if they start from the same qualifications in the qualification structure.

Today, however, none of the *implementation decrees* that are necessary to put the procedures regarding the Flemish qualifications framework into practice have been developed yet. Preparatory steps have been taken (e.g. discussions between stakeholders concerned from policy areas Education and Training, Work and Social Economy), but have not resulted yet in any approved implementation decrees.

“ This means that until today no qualifications have been officially “scaled” (linked to a level of the qualifications framework) and the procedures to include qualifications in the FQF are not yet in place. ”

This means that until today no qualifications have been officially “scaled” (linked to a level of the qualifications framework) and the procedures described above are not yet in place. Another consequence is that a number of other changes that will take place when the Flemish Act will be fully implemented, are not officialised yet today, for instance, the two databases mentioned above are not yet developed.

II.6 Criterion 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).

With the creation of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV) in 2009, the Flemish Government took the initiative to centralise all activities regarding the supervision of the quality of educational and training courses and procedures for recognition of acquired competences, both leading to recognised qualifications, within one entity, except for higher education.

The quality assurance system for education and training is described in paragraph I.2.4. In this paragraph we will emphasize a number of characteristics that show that the current quality assurance systems are consistent with the European principles and guidelines with regard to national contexts that are included in [annex 3 of the Recommendation](#). This chapter is structured per level or type of education and/or training.

II.6.1 Elementary and secondary education

The recent Parliament Act on Quality Assurance in Education of 1st September 2009 explicitly states that schools are responsible for their own quality. This led to a number of changes in the inspection approach. The most important change was the introduction of differentiated inspections. This means that the teams of inspectors select a number of aspects to be evaluated per school based on a pre-analysis of that school.

The fact whether schools have developed an *internal quality assurance* system is one of the criteria that are evaluated by the inspectorate (external evaluation). The extent to what schools make use of self-evaluation instruments varies strongly today. To strengthen the internal quality assurance of schools and their ability for a smooth conduct of policies, schools will be supported by the Pedagogical Support Services (*Pedagogische begeleidingsdiensten*). These services will be submitted to an external review in 2011.

In Flanders, it is quite recent that self-evaluation is officially encouraged as part of the present inspection system and the current-day programmes for external support of schools. Self-evaluation centres question whether elementary or secondary schools meet their own objectives which were formulated on the basis of their own pedagogical project. However, full inspections carried out by the inspectorate focus first and foremost on whether the school meets the minimum expectations society (i.e. the policy) lays down vis-à-vis the school.

Schools can avail of a range of tools which were developed for self-evaluation in elementary and secondary education. The diversity of the self-evaluation tools goes back to the various interpretations of the level of education, the aspects to be questioned, the methodologies followed, the functions of the self-evaluation, the guidance schools receive and such more. It is part of the school's autonomy how they will concretely interpret this self-evaluation.

Schools in elementary and secondary education are submitted to a *regular external review* by the inspectorate. In secondary education, the schedule is drawn up with a focus on school communities (all schools affiliated to one school community are inspected during one particular period). The Parliament Act on Quality Assurance in Education states that every institution has to be inspected at least once every 10 years. To ensure uniformity, all inspection teams use the same set of instruments. Moreover, inspection procedures are identical throughout the Flemish Community.

“ Schools in elementary and secondary education are submitted to a regular external review by the inspectorate. The fact whether schools have developed an internal quality assurance system is one of the criteria that are evaluated by the inspectorate. ”

The inspectorate uses the *CIPO (Context – Input – Process – Output) model*. This model has been used for a while, but is officially obliged by the Parliament Act on Quality Assurance in Education in 2009. The global framework is defined in the Parliament Act, the concrete content in implementation decrees. The interpretation of the different aspects of the model is as follows:

- **Context:** stable information regarding location, organising body, physical and structural conditions under which the school must operate and on which it hardly has any influence at all.
- **Input:** information on the conditions under which and the resources with which the school must develop its processes, but which it can influence to a certain extent such as staff (profile, further training and training), financial resources, courses of study offered, pupils (offer, profile)...
- **Process:** all the pedagogical and school-organisational characteristics which indicate what efforts the school makes to achieve the objectives laid down by the government.
- **Output:** both the hard output data which show to what extent the objectives (final objectives, curricula, progression/transition...) to be attained are achieved and the softer output data such as the well-being of pupils and teachers.

This choice of model implies that the inspectorate sees the performance of the teachers and principal within the overall school performance and that the school performance is placed within the local context. This model is used from a perspective of accountability and school development. The school inspection is both a means to check data within the school (accountability) and may be an occasion for the school to optimise the quality of the education it provides (development). In addition, the inspection team checks whether the school's infrastructure is adequate and whether statutory provisions are properly adhered to.

An inspection can result in three types of *advice*:

- favourable;
- favourable but for a limited time only: in that case a number of shortcomings have been established which must be rectified within a pre-set time frame. Once that period has expired, a progress check will be carried out in relation to said shortcomings;
- unfavourable; this will lead to the rescission of a school's recognition or part thereof.

Each inspection consists of three phases:

- Pre-analysis of existing sources and on-the-spot
- Actual inspection, consisting of a 3 to 6 days visit at the school. The methods that are used during the inspection visit are interviews, document analyses and observations.
- Inspection report: The conclusions of the inspection team are elaborated in an inspection report. This also contains the final advice. In line with administrative openness, *all inspection reports* are *published* on the Internet (www.schooldoorlichtingen.be).

Follow-up procedures were revised in 2006. When a school has been fully inspected a follow-up inspection will take place after three school years. Intermittent follow-ups are only possible if, due to very specific problems, this was so agreed with the inspection team and if it features in the inspection advice. The follow-up will be based on an *adjustment plan* the school has drawn up.

The *inspectorate* was subject to an *external review* by an independent consultant in 2001. In this review a broad group of stakeholders was involved. The inspectorate is currently being evaluated by the Belgian Audit Office with regard to the way the inspectorate organises its reviews. The results of the audit are expected to be finalised in the first quarter of 2011. Finally, the Flemish inspectorate is member of SICI, the organisation of national and regional inspectorates of education in Europe, a way to share knowledge and experience with similar organisations.

Inspections of the Centres for Adult Education, Centres for Adult Basic Education (CBEs), institutions providing part-time artistic education and the Pupil Guidance Centres are also comparable to inspections in elementary and secondary education.

II.6.2 Higher education

Higher education knows its own quality assurance rules and regulations. The principles of the quality assurance approach for higher education have been determined in the Parliament Act on Higher Education.

II.6.2.1 Internal quality assurance

Each *higher education institution* is expected to continuously assess the quality of the education it provides and the research it carries out. The Parliament Act on Higher Education states that higher education institutions have to permanently monitor at their own initiative the quality of their research and educational activities. For the latter, the Parliament Act adds that students, alumni and external experts have to be involved in internal (and external) quality assurance processes.

II.6.2.2 External reviews

All Bachelor's and Master's programmes have to undergo an external assessment. Assessment agencies or international accreditation bodies organise and coordinate these external assessment procedures. The panels, composed of independent experts, use the standards and criteria of NVAO's accreditation framework when assessing a programme. Assessment agencies additionally provide an assessment protocol which is both a manual for the programmes (on how to prepare for self-evaluations) and a manual for the expert panels (providing instructions on their visit and their subsequent reports). These are the procedures:

- The programme's internal quality assurance system produces a self-evaluation report
- The self-evaluation report is used by an expert panel to make a preliminary assessment of the programme. The composition of the panel should ensure the inclusion of the following expertise: subject-specific expertise, (relevant) educational expertise, international expertise, quality assurance expertise and student expertise (i.e. a student).
- The expert panel visits the programme in question and interviews relevant stakeholders.
- An assessment report is written on the basis of the findings in the self-evaluation report and the site visit. The considerations of the panel lead to conclusions and, where appropriate, recommendations for improvement.
- The Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (**NVAO**) uses the assessment report to take an accreditation decision.

In light of the Bologna process a decision was taken to introduce accreditation (building on longstanding internal and external quality assessment procedures). The term 'accreditation' means awarding a 'quality mark' which indicates that certain reference points on quality have been met. In Flanders, accreditation is a prerequisite for government funding/financing of a Bachelor's or Master's programme (but it does not confer the right to public funding) and for the right to award officially recognised qualifications. The initiative to apply for accreditation falls to the higher education institution. Programmes are assessed on the basis of 6 themes: objectives of the programme, the programme, staff, facilities, internal quality assurance and results.

“ In Flanders, accreditation is a prerequisite for government funding/financing of a Bachelor's or Master's programme and for the right to award officially recognised qualifications. ”

The **NVAO** uses the programme's assessment report as a basis for its accreditation decision. This decision is binary: either positive or negative. To reach its decision, the NVAO will examine whether the generic quality of the programme in question is up to standard. To that effect the NVAO developed an **accreditation framework** that specifies for each of the 6 themes a number of **areas with criteria per area**. The accreditation framework builds on the higher education's qualifications framework which has distinguished descriptors for professionally oriented Bachelor's programmes, for academic oriented Bachelor's programmes and for Master's programmes. Besides that, institutions can profile themselves by asking the expert panel to evaluate specific characteristics of an educational programme. This can lead to a special remark in the accreditation report and the award of a so-called distinguished quality feature.

II.6.3

Other training providers

Inspections of the Centres for Adult Education, Centres for Adult Basic Education (CBEs), institutions providing part-time artistic education and the Pupil Guidance Centres are comparable to inspections in elementary and secondary education.

Other training providers than the ones mentioned above have developed their own quality assurance systems. We explain the main ones below.

SYNTRA Vlaanderen is externally evaluated by the internal audit department of the Flemish administration (**Interne Audit van de Vlaamse Administratie – IAVA**) and by the quality auditors of the ESF-agency. The SYNTRA training centres are awarded several quality labels during the past years, including the ESF-label, Qfor, R4E, Prose, Iso,

SYNTRA Vlaanderen supervises the SYNTRAs (f.e. concerning quality). SYNTRA Vlaanderen uses an EFQM framework as a model for continuous improvement. Important elements in the quality system are programmes developed in collaboration with the sector, satisfaction surveys, complaint management, etc.

SYNTRA Vlaanderen decided in January 2009 to use the external ESF-quality audit as an integrated instrument for the whole SYNTRA Network for Entrepreneurial Training. To monitor the functioning of the network, SYNTRA Vlaanderen uses different indicators, such as measurements concerning customer satisfaction, effectiveness of the courses, profiles of people that the SYNTRA Network for Entrepreneurial Training reaches or profiles of learners who succeed the exams.

Each SYNTRA training centre has a quality director or coordinator, who represents his/her organisation in a working group for internal quality assurance for the SYNTRA Network for Entrepreneurial Training as a whole. This working group exchanges good practices concerning quality management systems, procedures for process control, etc... and develops guidelines and actions for the entire network.

Furthermore, SYNTRA appointed a complaint coordinator in each training centre and added the competences ‘customer oriented’ and ‘continuous improvement’ to most job descriptions and evaluation forms.

VDAB uses the EFQM framework as an internal quality management system, which is internally managed by the Quality Department. With regard to the training programmes that are organised by the VDAB, some VDAB trainings are externally evaluated by the use of certificates such as ISO9000. This type of quality assurance exists next to the permanent evaluation by its own Quality Department, as mentioned above. Like SYNTRA, another technique that is used within VDAB to manage the educational programme’s quality is to consult stakeholders through student satisfaction surveys, complaint management, students councils, etc. Furthermore, IAVA, the internal audit of the Flemish administration, is the external organisation which regularly evaluates the VDAB as an organisation and its subdivisions.

As far as **training in agriculture** is concerned, the Division Sustainable Agricultural

Development from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is in charge of the recognition of the organisers (the recognised training centres) and the on-site *inspections*.

Within *socio-cultural adult work*, the activities of the organisations are assessed on the basis of an *external review* by a mixed commission which seats members from the Agency Socio-Cultural Work for Youths and Adults (Agentschap Sociaal-cultureel werk voor jeugd en volwassenen) and external experts. The results of these reviews may have an impact on the levels of subsidies associations, specialised training institutions and movements receive in the future.

The Flemish government (see policy document of the Flemish Minister of Education for the legislature 2009-2014) plans to create an *integrated framework for quality assurance* for all institutions that award qualification certificates. It will consolidate the existing approaches of quality assurance and takes into account the principles that are stated in annex 3 of the EQF and those stated in the European recommendation on the reference framework for quality assurance in vocational training (EQAVET). The committee that elaborates the integrated framework consists of representatives of the main educational quality assurance bodies like the inspectorate and the Department of Education, but also of other training providers like Syntra Vlaanderen, VDAB, etc., It is a close collaboration between the policy areas “Education and Training” and “Work and Social Economy”.

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The Flemish government plans to create an integrated framework for quality assurance for all institutions that award qualification certificates.

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II.7 Criterion 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

This report on the referencing of the Flemish qualifications framework to the EQF has been agreed by the following quality assurance bodies, by means of their representation in the expert committee:

- The educational inspectorate of the Flemish Ministry of Education
- Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (***Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie – NVAO***)
- Recognized centra for training of self-employed and SME’s (***Erkende centra voor vorming van zelfstandigen en kleine en middelgrote ondernemingen – Syntra***)
- Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (***Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling – VDAB***)

II.8 Criterion 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts.

The referencing is guided and monitored by an expert committee. Two *European experts* are member of the expert committee: Ms. Aileen Ponton, Chief Executive Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership and Ms. Karin van der Sanden, Project leader for the Dutch qualifications framework of the Dutch Ministry for Education, Culture and Science.

In addition to these international experts, the *other Belgian communities* (French-speaking and German-speaking) are also represented in the steering committee. Mr. Jean-Pierre Malarne represents the French-speaking community (**Conseil de l'Education et de Formation**) and Mr. Jörg Vomberg has been appointed by the German-speaking community (**Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens**) to participate in the Flemish referencing process. Both communities have not yet finalised their own qualifications structure and framework. The way the three Belgian qualifications frameworks will relate to each other is not yet decided. This will, amongst others, depend on the number of levels and content of the two frameworks still to be developed.

The *expert committee* was gathered three times during the referencing process:

- A first meeting on 1 October 2010 to discuss the project approach and the table of content of the referencing report.
- A second meeting on 7 December 2010 to discuss a first version of the report (first two chapters). After processing the remarks of the expert committee, the report was sent to the stakeholders that have participated in the consultation process.
- A third meeting on 24 March 2011 to discuss the final report, including the results of the consultation process and the final conclusions.

II.9 Criterion 8

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.

This report has been coordinated and approved by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (**AKOV**). Moreover, it has been agreed by the expert committee that guided and monitored the referencing process and consisted (apart from 4 international experts and members of AKOV) of experts of the following organisations: Department of Education and Training, Department of Work and Economy, the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (**VDAB**), the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (**SYNTRA Vlaanderen**), Flanders Social and Economic Council (**SERV**), the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (**NVAO**) and The Flemish Education Council (**VLOR**). They take part in the committee as individual experts, not necessarily committing their organisations.

This is the single, comprehensive report setting out the referencing, and supporting evidence of the Flemish qualifications framework to the EQF. Besides the necessary background information on the European (see Part 1, chapter I.1 and Annex 1) and Flemish (see Part 1, chapter I.2 and I.3) situation regarding qualifications and the related frameworks, it clearly addresses each of the referencing criteria in Part 2.

“ This is the single, comprehensive report setting out the referencing, and supporting evidence of the Flemish qualifications framework to the EQF. ”

The report will be made available for all interested parties through publication by the National Coordination Point of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (**AKOV**).

II.10 Criterion 9

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.

On completion of this report, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training will inform the European Commission that the referencing process has been completed, and provide a link to the published referencing report.

II.11 Criterion 10

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

One of the elements of the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning is the following: member states should “adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and ‘Europass’ documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.”

Currently, diploma supplements according to the Europass conventions accompany every associate, bachelor or master degree in Flanders. Diploma supplements are automatically delivered in Dutch, but every student can receive an English version upon request (free service) from the higher education institution. People that have obtained a higher education degree in the former structure (before the Bologna restructuring) can request a translation of their old diploma supplement; this service however is not for free. A similar service exists for vocational education in the form of certificate supplements.

Currently, certificate supplements are available in Flanders for a number of certificates of work experience and certificates handed out by the VDAB. Flanders created a Europass agency that is responsible for the follow-up and the developments on certificate supplements (www.europass-vlaanderen.be).

Both diploma supplements and certificate supplements do not contain a reference to the Flemish qualifications framework nor to the European Qualifications Framework yet.

For other awards of formal or informal learning, no concrete procedures are yet in place. This will have to be specified in the implementation decrees following the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure that Flanders is working on, but have not been finalised nor approved yet. The Act however clearly mentions the importance of being able to communicate unambiguously about qualifications and the associated competences. Using references on diplomas, certificates, etc. will undoubtedly contribute to this objective.

PART THREE:

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

PART THREE: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

III.1 Results of the consultation sessions

In the expert committee that was created to accompany the referencing process, the most important stakeholders regarding the Flemish qualifications framework were represented. To allow a broader group of stakeholders however to give their opinion about the referencing process, it was decided that two supplementary consultation sessions had to be organised.

A first consultation session was organised with the support of the **SERV** and grouped **social partners**. The following organisations took part in the discussion:

- Association of Social Profit Entreprises (**Vereniging voor Social Profit Ondernemingen – Verso**)
- Flanders’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry (**Vlaams netwerk van Ondernemingen – VOKA**)
- General Christian Workers’ Union (**Algemeen Christelijk Werknemersverbond – ACW**) and General Christian Federation (**Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond – ACV**)
- General Labour Federation of Belgium (**Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond – ABVV**)
- Organisation for the Self-Employed and SMEs (**Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers – UNIZO**)

Besides the organisations mentioned above, the Farmer’s Union and the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (**Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België – ACLVB**) were also invited for the consultation, but were not able to take part in it.

The second consultation, of the **educational stakeholders**, was coordinated by the **VLOR** and took place through an existing platform, namely the OVA committee. This committee consists of representatives of the following organisations:

- Education providers:
 - ◆ Provincial Education Flanders (**Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen – POV**)*
 - ◆ Education of the Flemish Community (**Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap – GO!**)*
 - ◆ Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (**Onderwijssecretariaat van de Steden en Gemeenten van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap vzw – OVSG**)*
 - ◆ Flemish federation of Catholic Secondary Education (**Vlaams Verbond van het Katholiek Secundair Onderwijs – VVKSO**)*
 - ◆ Flemish Council for Catholic Primary Education (**Vlaams Verbond van Katholiek**

Basisonderwijs – VSKO)

- ◆ Flemish Council of University Colleges (*Vlaamse Hogescholenraad – VLHORA*)
- ◆ Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse interuniversitaire raad – VLIR*)
- Educational Unions:
 - ◆ Christian Education Union (*Christelijke Onderwijscentrale – COC*)*
 - ◆ Liberal Union for the Public Sector (*Vrij Syndicaat voor het Openbaar Ambt – VSOA*)
 - ◆ Socialist Union for Public Services (*Algemene Centrale der Openbare Diensten – ACOD*)
- Flemish Association of Students (*Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten – VVS*)
- Flemish Pupil Association (*Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel – VSK*)
- Adult education
- Pupil Guidance Centres (*Vrije Centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding – VCLB*)
- Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling – VDAB*)*
- The Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (*Syntra Vlaanderen*)
- Department for Education and Training (*Departement Onderwijs en Vorming*)*
- Social partners:
 - ◆ Flanders’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Vlaams netwerk van ondernemingen – VOKA*)
 - ◆ Organisation for the Self-Employed and SMEs (*Unie van zelfstandige ondernemers – UNIZO*)
 - ◆ Farmers’ Union (*Boerenbond*)
 - ◆ General Christian Workers’ Union (*Algemeen Christelijk Werknemersverbond – ACW*)
 - ◆ General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (*Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België – ACLVB*)*
 - ◆ General Labour Federation of Belgium (*Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond – ABVV*)

For this consultation two extra members (in addition to the regular representatives in the committee) were invited for the following councils:

- Council for Secondary Education (*Raad Secundair Onderwijs*)
- Council for Lifelong and Lifewide Learning (*Raad voor Levenslang en Levensbreed Leren*)*
- Council for Higher Education (*Raad Hoger Onderwijs*)*

Besides the VLOR itself, the organisations that are followed by a * in the list effectively took part in the session.

In both cases the stakeholders received the report one week before the consultation session and had the opportunity to comment on it during the meeting. The discussion was structured by the use of 4 questions:

1. Do you agree with the conclusions of the referencing exercise? (see part II of the report)
Remark: Especially the conclusion that the 8 levels of the Flemish qualifications framework align with the 8 levels of the European qualifications framework is important.
2. Are there elements lacking in the report or are certain elements/themes insufficiently elaborated?
3. What is your vision on the importance and the added value of the referencing exercise?
4. Are there specific issues concerning this referencing exercise that you can identify for your sector/organisation?

The questions were sent to the participants beforehand, so that they could prepare their answers.

Before presenting the answers to the four specific questions we want to emphasize a general remark that was made by the two groups of stakeholders. As mentioned throughout the report, the implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Flanders has not been realised yet. Several bottlenecks still have to be clarified and a number of issues are still under discussion. Therefore the report focuses on the description and evaluation of the AS IS situation with regard to the Flemish Qualifications Framework. This means, among others, that no concrete examples of qualifications that correspond with a certain level of the FQF are yet available. Moreover, the implementation decrees that still have to be developed will have an important impact on the way the FQF is going to be applied in practice.

Because of this lack of concretisation, the participants found it difficult to express their opinion about the referencing process and more particularly on the impact of this process. The answers that are summarized below have to be read while keeping this important remark in mind.

“ Because of the lack of concretisation of the FQF, the participants in the consultation process found it difficult to express their opinion about the impact of the referencing process. ”

QUESTION 1: DO YOU AGREE WITH THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE REFERENCING EXERCISE?

Remark: Especially the conclusion that the 8 levels of the Flemish qualifications framework align with the 8 levels of the European qualifications framework is important.

The stakeholders generally agreed that the report gives a clear description of the present state of affairs. Furthermore, they confirmed that the referencing exercise was executed in a correct and accurate way.

Furthermore, all stakeholders agreed that the levels of the EQF, in general, align with the levels of the FQF. In addition to this conclusion though, they did observe some differences too:

- It appears that the expectations concerning 'knowledge' in the different levels are higher according to the FQF than to the EQF. In addition, abilities such as 'understanding' and 'interpreting' are appearing in lower levels in the FQF than in the EQF.
- Besides, the different levels in the EQF are described in a very general way, which makes it difficult to compare them with the concrete context in Flanders. Especially the distinction between educational and professional qualifications in Flanders makes the Flemish Qualifications Framework more complex than the European one.
- Finally, the stakeholders had a number of semantic comments, as both frameworks use different level descriptors. The fact that the EQF considers 'autonomy' and 'responsibility' as included in the term 'competences' makes the comparison less transparent. This kind of semantic interpretations present a risk when frameworks from different countries will be compared through the EQF. Therefore it is important to emphasize that this exercise compares two quite similar frameworks, the EQF and the FQF, but does not equate them. This means that another national qualifications framework, which is similar to the EQF, is not unconditionally equal to the FQF.

QUESTION 2: ARE THERE ELEMENTS LACKING IN THE REPORT OR ARE CERTAIN ELEMENTS/THEMES INSUFFICIENTLY ELABORATED?

The stakeholders agreed that generally spoken the report is a very complete and well structured document.

Some stakeholders mentioned a number of topics that they believed should have been more emphasized in the report. These remarks have been taken into account in this final version of the report that was completed after the stakeholder consultation. The most important elements that were emphasised in the report after the consultation sessions concerned:

- The report is an evolving document which will be regularly updated to remain consistent with the actual situation in Flanders (p.4).

- More information about continuing education is needed, for example vocational training organised by the sector or by private companies (p.20) and postgraduates (p.18).
- It should be clarified that the structuring of the intermediate conclusions in criterion 2 two by two does not mean that they would not have been compared with all the lower and higher levels (p.49).
- The diploma supplements and certificate supplements do not contain a reference to the Flemish qualifications framework nor to the European Qualifications Framework yet (p.76).

QUESTION 3: WHAT IS YOUR VISION ON THE IMPORTANCE AND THE ADDED VALUE OF THE REFERENCING EXERCISE?

Due to the fact the FQF has not been implemented yet, most stakeholders remained a bit resilient with regard to this question. Although it is difficult to estimate the real impact, most stakeholders agreed that the approval of a Flemish Qualifications Framework and the referencing of the FQF to the EQF is an important step forward in the enhancement of study and labour mobility within Europe from a Flemish point of view. The conclusions of this referencing exercise create a platform for mobility within Europe, for students as well as employees. Since Flanders is considered being a “receiving region”, mobility is very important for the Flemish labour market.

On the other hand, the stakeholders would find a direct comparison between the participating countries more useful. As mentioned before, some stakeholders questioned the approach that aims at a ‘best fit’ of a national framework with the European framework and wondered whether it will still be a ‘fit’ if national frameworks are compared to each other.

QUESTION 4: ARE THERE SPECIFIC ISSUES CONCERNING THIS REFERENCING EXERCISE THAT YOU CAN IDENTIFY FOR YOUR SECTOR/ORGANISATION?

The stakeholders indicated that the implementation of the Flemish Qualifications Framework is their main concern at this moment. The referencing exercise can only be fully finalised when the discussions concerning the FQF are clarified and the framework is in use. The labour-oriented organisations that took part in the discussion found it therefore difficult to estimate the actual impact of the exercise for their sector or organisation. Stakeholders involved in secondary education stated that the situation concerning educational qualifications and the role of final objectives needs to be clarified. Final objectives have a highly educational approach, which is not always compatible with the qualification thinking. This is an important determinant for the application of the FQF.

In higher education initiatives are being taken by the sector itself to align educational programmes and qualifications on European level. The referencing report provides great added value to support these types of initiatives. It clarifies how qualifications within different European countries are related to each other. Finally, the stakeholders mentioned that the report is a useful instrument for all interested parties that are not fully up-to-date with regard to the current situation of the FQF in Flanders.

III.2 Opinion of the international experts

III.2.1 Reflections of Aileen Ponton, SCQF

I was delighted to be asked to act as an international expert for the Flemish Referencing to the EQF. Firstly because we had completed our own referencing and so the processes and issues were still very fresh in my mind. Secondly I had no knowledge of the Flemish education system and their Framework so this was an ideal opportunity to see if the referencing process itself would aid understanding of a system and Framework.

My first thoughts are that the overall process was well managed. The Referencing Steering Group was made up, in addition to the international experts, of representatives from a wide community within Flanders. I was very impressed with the spread of people and with the commitment of those who contributed. All members read each of the papers and reports and commented on them constructively so it appeared to be also quite a harmonious process. Also the consultants undertaking the work were both efficient and effective and produced clear documentation supplemented by good presentations asking what I thought were the key questions.

Both the report itself and the processes involved in producing the report provided me with a very much better understanding of the Flemish system and some of its real strengths in areas such as recognition of employer based training and also informal and non formal learning. I also gained a real insight into the different educational structures and components and their associated quality assurance. The discussions at the meetings were wide ranging and people all got the opportunity to pick over all of the aspects of the report but also took the opportunity to question the two international experts on their approaches to various aspects of the work which I thought was also useful both to them and to us.

The main area of challenge both for the consultants and for the Steering Group is that the Framework is not yet fully implemented and this means that the consultation on the referencing process, whilst undertaken in as complete a way as possible, indicated that people were a little uncertain because they could not quite see all of the relationships in a “live “ sense. In addition the referencing could only compare level descriptors with level descriptors and could not, as some other countries have done, also carry out a piece of work to look at how individual qualifications map back against the home country Framework and the EQF. This was recognised by the group as an issue and I feel this is clearly set out in the final report. It does mean that it will be seen as a work in progress which may well need to be revisited earlier than some others as work to implement the Framework moves forward at some point.

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III.2.2

Reflections of Karin van der Sanden

In July 2010 Jan Meers from the Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV), the Flemish national coordination point for the EQF, asked me to be one of the international experts in the referencing process of the Flemish qualifications Framework to the EQF. I have to admit that on the one hand I was very pleased to play a small role in the Flemish process. Flanders is one of our neighbouring countries and student and workers' mobility is an actual fact. Moreover, I had asked Wilfried Boomgaert from the Flemish ministry of Education and Training to participate in the Dutch referencing process. On the other hand I did hesitate for a moment being in the process of developing the Dutch qualifications framework and having to complete the referencing process and report in the same period. I am happy to have agreed eventually, which gave me the opportunity to learn from this well managed process.

To start with, the Steering Group represented a wide group of stakeholders within the Flemish community, including representatives of employers' organisations, unions and quality assurance organisations. Next to the foreign experts, Aileen Ponton and myself, two representatives of the French and German community in Belgium were part of the Steering Group as well. This way the link between the different qualifications frameworks in Belgium was ensured. All members of the Steering Group had every opportunity to react on the drafts of the report and did so. This means that the referencing report reflects the opinion of the Flemish members of the Steering Group.

During the whole process the Flemish qualifications framework itself has not been a topic of discussion, since this was approved by the Flemish parliament on 30th April 2009. An important aspect of this framework is that the qualifications framework itself does not yet "contain" qualifications. Only a few qualifications in higher education have been related by the NVAO to the framework. Therefore the referencing itself is a very technical exercise.

This technical exercise has been executed very thoroughly. The report clearly explains how the Flemish educational system is organised. Additionally the report explains clearly how the 10 criteria were met.

In conclusion I feel that the Flemish qualifications framework has been well referenced to the EQF and that the necessary quality assurance is in place. The fact remains that qualifications frameworks are in constant development which makes a referencing report per definition a snapshot of that moment, asking for revision when major changes occur. The actual aligning of qualifications to the Flemish framework might be such a major change.

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PART FOUR:

CONCLUSIONS

PART FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

The Flemish qualifications framework was approved by the Flemish government on 30th April 2009. This referencing report is the single comprehensive report setting out the referencing and supporting evidence of the Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) to the European qualifications framework (EQF). The referencing process was carried out according to the criteria defined by the EQF Advisory Group. The direct involvement of stakeholders of the areas of education and work through an expert committee that accompanied the process was an important aspect of this process. Through this expert committee the involvement of international experts was ensured as well since Ms. Aileen Ponton, Chief Executive Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership and Ms. Karin van der Sanden, Project leader for the Dutch qualifications framework of the Dutch Ministry for Education, Culture and Science took part.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the exercise is the fact that there is a clear and demonstrable link between the levels of the FQF and the EQF as follows:

<i>EQF</i>	<i>FQF</i>
Level 1	Level 1
Level 2	Level 2
Level 3	Level 3
Level 4	Level 4
Level 5	Level 5
Level 6	Level 6
Level 7	Level 7
Level 8	Level 8

The comparison of both frameworks was based on the “best-fit” principle, meaning that a level of one framework is aligned to the level of the other framework that ‘matches best’ based on a comparison of the complete level descriptors, not the individual elements of it.

The referencing process has also demonstrated:

- that the FQF is based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and so are the educational and professional qualifications it contains,
- that the FQF is linked to credit systems, namely in higher education, and to practical arrangements for “recognising acquired competences” (validation of non-formal and informal learning);

- that the basic principles of the necessary policies and procedures for the inclusion of educational and professional qualifications in the FQF have been determined and approved by the Parliament Act on the Flemish qualifications structure of 30th April 2009, but not implemented yet (except for higher education where the implementation has started);
- that the quality assurance systems operating in Flemish education and training underpin the FQF and its implementation and are in line with annex 3 of the recommendation;
- that the relevant quality assurance bodies have been consulted on the referencing process and have stated their agreement to it.

This referencing report is written in the period October 2010 until March 2011. At this time the Flemish qualifications framework was approved for quite a while already (since 30th April 2009). Due to continuing discussions on some of the procedures with regard to the way the framework has to be implemented, the framework however is not yet put into practice. This turned out to be the main barrier for the consulted stakeholders to give a clear vision on the referencing process. As they are not sure today what impact the implementation decrees will have on the application of the framework, they are hesitating to explicitly formulate their opinion. Still, we can draw a number of general conclusions from the stakeholder consultation. The stakeholders agree with the approach for the referencing exercise and found that the process was correctly carried out. They also agree that this referencing process is an important prerequisite to be able to use the FQF to stimulate students' and workers' mobility from and towards Flanders. The development of a FQF is considered as an important step forward in the recognition of qualifications and competences. All stakeholders involved however emphasize the importance of accelerated decision making regarding the implementation decrees to be able to fully exploit the potential added value of the framework.

This document describes the Flemish situation at a specific moment in time. The FQF and its related procedures have to be considered as work-in-progress. Therefore, the referencing report is to be considered as an evolving document that will be regularly updated whenever important new developments and initiatives regarding the FQF have taken place or when the framework is implemented and qualifications are put in place.

ANNEX

ANNEX 1: EUROPEAN CONTEXT

A The European Education Policy

A.1. Lisbon objectives

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

In March 2000 the European Council formulated ambitious objectives for the European Union during a special meeting in Lisbon. Because of the developments in the economy and society, such as globalisation and the growing importance of ICT, the European Union had to adapt its strategy. The council agreed to aim at *“becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”*.

To reach this goal, it requires more than a transformation of the European economy. One of the key components for a well-functioning knowledge-based economy is a modern educational system. Therefore the Lisbon European Council set the objective for education and training in the European Union to increase transparency of qualifications in order to adapt to the demands of the knowledge society. By increasing the transparency of qualifications, lifelong learning will be stimulated and mobility between the different member states will become more feasible for students as well as for employees.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010

As from the year 2000 the European Council meets every spring to follow progress of the Lisbon strategy and to set more concrete targets. In 2001 in Stockholm the Council agrees on 3 strategic objectives to modernise the European education system:

- Improving quality & effectiveness
- Opening-up education and training systems to the wider world
- Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems

To attain these goals, a detailed work programme for education and training systems was introduced the next year. For the first time, a framework for European cooperation was developed concerning education and training, based on common objectives with as main purpose optimising the national education and training systems supported by EU-tools, mutual learning and sharing good practices.

By executing this programme, Europe aims to be recognised as a worldwide reference for high quality education and training by 2010, in order to attract students, scholars and researchers from other world regions. Within the European Union this programme creates compatible education and training systems and gives the opportunity to validate qualifications achieved in other countries, which enables easier mobility between the

member states. Furthermore, Europe wants to stimulate lifelong learning by giving access to education and training systems at all ages.

Activities in line with this work programme are gathered under the name 'Education & training 2010' as from 2004.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2020

The results of the work programme, in combination with the efforts in line with the Bologna and Copenhagen process (see further), provide large progression with regard to national reformations to stimulate lifelong learning, the modernisation of Higher Education and the development of common European tools to support quality, transparency and mobility. Yet, the Lisbon ambitions to become a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy are not fully reached.

In 2009 'Education and training 2010' was replaced by a new version, 'Education and training 2020', which builds on its predecessor. This framework provides four common strategic objectives to support the member states in further developing their educational and training system:

- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Making lifelong learning a reality
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

A.2. Bologna process

HISTORY AND OBJECTIVES

An important step towards a better mutual cooperation in Higher Education in the European Union was taken in Sorbonne in 1998. The education ministers of France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom expressed the central role of Universities in developing the European cultural dimensions and stressed that the harmonisation of European higher education is essential for citizens' mobility and employability and the overall development of Europe.

In 1999, 29 countries engaged in a voluntary process to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by signing the Bologna Declaration.

The emphasis in the Bologna Declaration was put on a highly qualitative, attractive and competitive European higher educational system, where transparency and recognition of programmes make students more mobile and employable within the different states that joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This area would be established by 2010 and now consists of 47 member countries.

More concretely, the Declaration aimed for the following 6 objectives:

1. adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
2. adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate;
3. establishment of a system of credits, such as in the ECTS;
4. promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff;
5. promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
6. promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education.

These six objectives are the essence of the Bologna process and have since been developed further, see below.

Since 1999 ministerial meetings take place every 2 years to discuss the progress of the Bologna process. During these meetings the agenda was broadened and greater precision was given to the systems that had to be developed. One of the results of these meetings was that the undergraduate/postgraduate degree structure has been modified into a three-cycle system. The first cycle is often referred to as the Bachelor's level. This cycle also includes 'short' programmes ("associate degrees") which provide access to the labour market as well as to other courses to continue studying for a Bachelor degree. This short cycle is integrated in the qualifications framework for EHEA since the ministers agreed in Bergen (2005) that the framework would include the possibility of intermediate qualifications, within national contexts. The second cycle is now referred to as the Master's level. The third cycle describes the qualifications to gain a Doctoral degree. This system includes the concept of qualifications frameworks, with an emphasis on learning outcomes.

To implement the decisions taken in the ministerial meetings, the Bologna Follow-up group (BFUG) was set up, which contains representatives of the participating countries as well as social partners. Their primary objective is to ensure and facilitate the comparability and the link between national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and the EHEA Framework, sustained by a relationship based on cooperation.

During the anniversary conference in March 2010 in Budapest-Vienna the European Higher Education Area was officially launched.

DUBLIN DESCRIPTORS

The first shared descriptors for Bachelor and Master degrees were proposed in March 2002. In 2004, a set of descriptors for the third cycle (Doctoral degree) and the short cycle (within the first cycle) was agreed upon. These descriptors, referred to as the Dublin descriptors were integrated in the QF-EHEA in 2005. The complete set of 'Dublin descriptors' is set out below:

	<i>Short cycle (within the first cycle)</i>	<i>First cycle (Bachelor)</i>	<i>Second cycle (Master)</i>	<i>Third cycle (Doctoral)</i>
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle.	Demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon and their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study.	Demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.	Demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field.
Applying knowledge and understanding	Can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts.	Can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.	Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study.	Demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity. Made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication.
Making judgement	Have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems.	Have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues.	Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.	Is capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas.
Communication	Can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients.	Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.	Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.	Can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise.
Learning skills	Have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.	Developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.	Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.	Can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

Source: Joint Quality Initiative informal group (2004), Shared 'Dublin' descriptors for Short Cycle, First Cycle, Second Cycle and Third Cycle Awards, 5p.

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS)

In the framework of the Bologna Declaration, the participants formulated the need for a system of credits. These credits correspond with learning outcomes and can be transferred between different member states, in order to recognise periods of studying abroad. This tool was originally introduced in 1989 as pilot scheme within the Erasmus programme to compare courses and modules easily.

Since 2009 every institution which applies ECTS provides course descriptions that contain learning outcomes and information about the workload. The learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do, which is in turn expressed in terms of credits.

Next to a credit transfer system, ECTS developed into an accumulation system, which means that students can obtain a degree by achieving a certain number of credits.

Because of the compatibility of credits in the European member states teaching and learning across Europe becomes more transparent and flexible, which contributes to greater student mobility within the European Union. This student centred system became a cornerstone of the European Higher Education Area by enhancing the quality and volume of student mobility in Europe.

EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE (ESG)

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Universities' Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) received the mandate to design a set of European standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG). As agreed on in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the four associations explored which standards and guidelines would designate an adequate system for internal and external quality assurance and for quality assurance agencies.

The standards are divided in three parts:

- Internal quality assurance of higher education institutions
- External quality assurance of higher education
- Quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies

The ESG improves the consistency of quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) so higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies across the EHEA will be able to use common reference points for quality assurance.

The cornerstone of the ESG is that higher education institutions themselves are responsible for quality assurance and therefore they need to develop a 'quality culture', an institutional and individual attitude that strives for continuous enhancement of quality. Students and stakeholders will be involved in the quality assurance processes.

A.3. Copenhagen process

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

Besides cooperation concerning higher education, the development of high quality vocational education and training is a crucial and integral part to execute the Lisbon strategy, notably in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness. In November 2002 this need was discussed, with the Copenhagen Declaration as result. The objective of this declaration is to develop an enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training by 2010.

The Copenhagen declaration formulates 4 priorities, which are in line with previous initiatives in the Lisbon strategy framework:

- Improving cooperation in order to make a world-wide reference for learners
- Transparency, information and guidance
- Recognition of competences and qualifications
- Quality assurance

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (EQAVET)

In line with the renewed Lisbon strategy and the Copenhagen Process a major step forward was taken for vocational education and training in May 2009 with the development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET, ref. see further).

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework can be described as a ‘toolbox’, which can be used as a reference instrument to monitor the improvement of the quality of the system of vocational education and government. It promotes a culture of quality improvement and responsibility at all levels (VET-system, VET-provider and qualification-awarding levels) by suggesting a methodology of self-assessment. This methodology aims to increase transparency of, and consistency in, the development of VET policy developments in Member States and enables hereby comparable statements about the status of quality assurance in vocational education and training.

Member States should develop approaches for improving their national quality assurance systems by 18 June 2011 at the latest.

In order to support the implementation of EQAVET, the European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) network has been installed and has replaced the former ENQA-VET network in 2010. In line with the Copenhagen process, ENQA-VET was designed in 2005 as a framework to develop, disseminate and promote best European practice and governance in the field of quality assurance in VET at systems and provider’s level. EQAVET builds on the achievements of ENQA-VET.

Besides supporting the implementation of EQAVET, the EQAVET network is used as an instrument for the communication process between the EU member states, the social partners and the European Commission. Furthermore, EQAVET takes developments in the several European tools into consideration (f.e. NQFs and ECVET)

EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET)

ECVET was launched with EQAVET on 20th May 2009 in order to create a European Credit System, like ECTS, for Vocational education and training. ECVET can be defined as a (voluntary) framework describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes.

As in the ECTS, each unit of learning outcomes can be associated with a certain number of ECVET points developed on the basis of common European standards. 60 points correspond to the learning outcomes achieved in a year of full-time VET.

By making learning and qualification systems more open to each other, compatibility between general and vocational education and training (VET) systems is increased. This allows individuals to build their own learning pathways to qualifications, which contributes to the principle of lifelong learning and increases mobility within the European member states.

B The European Qualifications framework

B.1. The objectives of the EQF

Although education policies are the responsibility of member states, the European Union supports them by taking initiatives to optimise cooperation, mobility and transparency between the different states. Aligned with this vision the European Union started to develop a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2004 as a result of the European policy in line with the Lisbon Strategy and the Copenhagen Process, which was formally adopted in February 2008.

By taking the initiative to create this common qualifications framework for the European member states, the European Union wants to increase comparability of skills, knowledge and competences of learners between different European countries.

The two main aims of a European Qualifications Framework are to promote mobility and lifelong learning. By relating different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together around a common European reference it will become easier to compare qualifications from different countries, institutions or activities. This increases the possibility for students as well as employees to move around Europe. It helps applicants to describe their skills, knowledge and competences to recruiters and complements existing European mobility instruments such as Europass, Erasmus, and ECTS.

Furthermore, the EQF stimulates lifelong learning by enclosing all levels of qualifications acquired in general, vocational as well as academic education and training. Individuals with extensive experience from work or other fields of activity are supported by facilitating validation of non-formal and informal learning.

EQF can be considered as a meta-framework as the participating member states have already developed or are currently developing their own National Qualifications Framework, which is expected to be related to the EQF by 2010. The aim of the EQF is to connect these NQFs, not to merge or reform them. By 2012 all new qualifications should carry a reference to the appropriate EQF level, while the awarding of these levels will remain a national responsibility. Although this is a voluntary process, 32 European countries agreed to cooperate in the creating of this network of independent but mutually understandable qualification systems. Since 2004 a rapid development of NQF occurred, which showed the need of increased transparency and comparability of qualifications at all levels.

To support the use of the EQF and NQFs, several experts representing the European Commission, national authorities and social partners joined an EQF advisory group. This group aims at discussing issues pertaining to the implementation of the EQF, the design and maintenance of the NQF and the referencing between NQFs and the EQF. Currently there are two sub-groups of the EQF Advisory Group, one focuses on quality assurance and the other on the criteria for referencing the NQFs to the EQF.

B.2. The principle of learning outcomes

LEARNING OUTCOMES IN EQF

The EQF is characterised by eight level descriptors, which are the core of this framework. Each level describes what a learner knows (knowledge), understands (skills) and is able to do (competences). In the European Qualifications Framework 'knowledge' can be theoretical as well as factual, whereas 'skills' can attain logical, intuitive and creative thinking (cognitive skills) or manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments (practical skills). Within the EQF level descriptors, 'competences' are defined in terms of the ability to execute certain tasks autonomously and in a responsible way.

By using these three elements, EQF focuses on learning results rather than on inputs such as length or type of study. This method ensures that a qualification takes into account theoretical knowledge as well as practical and technical skills, completed with social competences in working environments.

This facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning since the evaluation of learning outcomes will give a clear view on whether or not a certain experience can be equivalent in content and relevance to formal qualifications.

The focus on learning outcomes is necessary to make comparison and cooperation between institutions and countries possible, as the education and training systems in Europe are so diverse.

COMPATIBLE WITH EHEA

The higher levels of the EQF are compatible with the qualifications framework for Higher Education developed under the Bologna Process. Especially the description of levels 5-8 refer to the description which is agreed concerning higher education under the Bologna Process (see further). However, in contrast with the EHEA, EQF includes all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational.

B.3. Overview of level descriptors and definitions

In the table below the European Qualifications Framework is presented. A description is given for each type of learning outcome related to a certain level.

	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Competence</i>
Level 1	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change ➤ Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5*	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change ➤ Review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6**	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts ➤ Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7***	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches ➤ Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8****	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Source: European Parliament and Council (2008), Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, 7p.

* The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.

** The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.

*** The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.

**** The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

B.4. Quality assurance principles for implementation

As the EQF recommendation is a European tool that can be used on a voluntary base, the implementation can not be enforced. When implementing the EQF recommendation, this should be done as a whole package containing the eight level descriptors, the definitions, the learning outcomes approach and the common principles for quality assurance in higher education and VET. By consequence, when implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance should be carried out in accordance with the following principles (cf. EU recommendation, annex III):

- “Quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework.
- Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions.
- Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies.
- External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.
- Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.

- Quality assurance systems should include the following elements
 - ◆ clear and measurable objectives and standards;
 - ◆ guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
 - ◆ appropriate resources;
 - ◆ consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
 - ◆ feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
 - ◆ widely accessible evaluation results.

- Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.

- Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community.

- Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.”

ANNEX 2: SUMMARIZED REPORT OF THE STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION

In the expert committee that accompanied the referencing process, the most important stakeholders regarding the Flemish qualifications framework were represented. To allow a broader group of stakeholders however to give their opinion about the referencing process, it was decided that two supplementary consultation sessions had to be organised. In this chapter we will give a summary of the feedback on this referencing report we received from the stakeholders during two consultation sessions, one with the social partners on 24th January 2011 and one with educational stakeholders on 11th February 2011.

A CONSULTATION OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERS

The purpose of the consultation session that was organised via the SERV (Flanders Social and Economic Council) was to get to know the opinion of the *social partners* on the referencing exercise between the EQF and the FQF.

SUMMARY

QUESTION 1: DO YOU AGREE WITH THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE REFERENCING EXERCISE?

- **Organisation for the Self-Employed and SMEs (Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers – UNIZO):**

The report is based on the current decree, but the social partners still have remarks concerning the content and interpretation of this decree. Although the representatives agree that the referencing exercise itself is well executed, they find it difficult to validate the report as they are not able to assess the future impact this validation because the framework is not implemented yet.
- **Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Vlaams netwerk van Ondernemingen – VOKA):**

The referencing exercise is well done. However, it has not been an easy exercise. The fact that the FQF uses five level descriptors and the EQF uses only three is one of the causes complicates the exercise. This makes it more difficult to be fully transparent and could lead to differences in interpretation.

QUESTION 2: ARE THERE ELEMENTS LACKING IN THE REPORT OR ARE CERTAIN ELEMENTS/THEMES INSUFFICIENTLY ELABORATED?

➤ **UNIZO:**

The representatives of UNIZO mentioned that more information about other training and education systems besides regular education should be added to the report. After all, the Flemish Qualifications Framework includes the whole educational scenery, not only compulsory and higher education. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that, in Flanders, professional qualifications also can be acquired at the levels 6, 7 and 8.

QUESTION 3: WHAT IS YOUR VISION ON THE IMPORTANCE AND THE ADDED VALUE OF THE REFERENCING EXERCISE?

➤ **UNIZO:**

The added value of the report is that it shows that Flanders did not give enough attention to the aspects linked to the labour market while developing the FQF. The report therefore reveals bottlenecks and action points.

QUESTION 4: ARE THERE SPECIFIC ISSUES CONCERNING THIS REFERENCING EXERCISE THAT YOU CAN IDENTIFY FOR YOUR SECTOR/ORGANISATION?

➤ **UNIZO:**

The social partners need further development of the content and implementation of the FQF rather than this referencing exercise. For example, some shortage occupations receive little support from the educational sector because everybody is waiting for the Flemish Qualifications Framework to be implemented.

OTHER REMARKS?

➤ **UNIZO:**

It is important to indicate that what period the report describes. This should be mentioned in the introduction. Europe should know that further steps will follow regarding the implementation of the FQF.

➤ **VOKA:**

The content of the ongoing discussions regarding the FQF should be mentioned.

➤ **General Christian Federation (Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond – ACV):**

What is the situation in the other Belgian regions?

B CONSULTATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

The purpose of the consultation session that was organised via the VLOR (Flemish Education Council) was to get to know the opinion of the *educational stakeholders* on the referencing exercise between the EQF and the FQF.

SUMMARY

QUESTION 1: DO YOU AGREE WITH THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE REFERENCING EXERCISE?

- ***Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad – VLOR):***
 In general we agree with the conclusions concerning the alignment of the EFQ to the FQF, although there are some differences:

 - ◆ The EQF uses 5 level descriptors, while the FQF uses only 3
 - ◆ The expectations of the Flemish framework concerning knowledge are higher than in the European framework.

- ***Flemish federation of Catholic Secondary Education (Vlaams Verbond van het Katholiek Secundair Onderwijs – VVKSO):***
 The translation of the European structure to the Flemish level is complex because of the distinction between general and professional education. For example, the report states that the qualification which is needed to acquire a certificate for Flemish primary education is aligned with level 1 of the EQF, while the EQF describes the requirements in a very general way. Therefore it is difficult to translate them to a concrete educational context. For example, ‘Understanding’ and ‘interpreting’ are not explicitly expected at this level of EQF, where Flanders is convinced that these elements should occur in every educational context.

- ***Council for Higher Education (Raad Hoger Onderwijs):***
 There is a semantic discussion concerning, for example, the word ‘autonomy’. Each participating country interprets this word in its own context, which makes it very difficult to compare frameworks of different European countries. The differences in context should be considered in the report.

- ***Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling – VDAB):***
 We cannot fully agree with the conclusions of the referencing exercise yet as there are so many aspects that have to be further developed.

- ***Raad Hoger Onderwijs:***
 The introduction should more clearly mention the fact that the report is an evolving document.

QUESTION 2: ARE THERE ELEMENTS LACKING IN THE REPORT OR ARE CERTAIN ELEMENTS/THEMES INSUFFICIENTLY ELABORATED?

- ***Council for Lifelong and Lifewide Learning (Raad Levenslang en Levensbreed Leren), Provincial Education Flanders (Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen – POV) and Raad Hoger Onderwijs:***

‘Non-regular’ education (for example post graduates) is underexposed in the report. Some information about sector-education and training organised by private companies should be added, since these types of education and training will also be linked to a certain qualification level.

- ***Raad Hoger Onderwijs:***

The way the intermediate conclusions for criterion 2 are structured should be reconsidered. They state that it could be more interesting to compare different levels, such as level 5 en 6 and/or 6 and 7.

- ***VDAB:***

Some more information about ‘EVC’ (Earlier acquired competences) should be added to the report. Furthermore partial qualifications are not mentioned in the information about opportunities to move up.

- ***POV:***

In criterion 10 certificate supplements are mentioned. The report should mention more clearly that these supplements are not yet linked to a certain level of the qualifications framework.

QUESTION 3: WHAT IS YOUR VISION ON THE IMPORTANCE AND THE ADDED VALUE OF THE REFERENCING EXERCISE?

- ***VDAB and Raad Levenslang en Levensbreed Leren:***

In the context of an increasing labour mobility within Europe, the levels offer a useful instrument to make comparisons, for instance in the case of recruitment. Certainly for a region as Flanders, being a ‘receiving region’.

- ***Raad Hoger Onderwijs:***

It would be interesting to make a direct comparison between participating countries. Now, the risk occurs that there are differences in interpretation. Each national qualifications framework is developed based on the context of the country. The participants wonder to what extent two countries being aligned with the European framework according to the ‘best fit-principle’ still can be considered as a ‘fit’ between the national frameworks.

QUESTION 4: ARE THERE SPECIFIC ISSUES CONCERNING THIS REFERENCING EXERCISE THAT YOU CAN IDENTIFY FOR YOUR SECTOR/ORGANISATION?

➤ ***Raad Hoger Onderwijs:***

In higher education initiatives are being taken by the sector itself to align educational programmes and qualifications on European level. The referencing report provides great added value to support these types of initiatives. It clarifies how qualifications within different European countries are related to each other.

➤ ***Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Onderwijssecretariaat van de Steden en Gemeenten van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap vzw – OVSG):***

Stakeholders involved in secondary education stated that the situation concerning educational qualifications and the role of final objectives needs to be clarified. Final objectives have a highly educational approach, which is not always compatible with the qualification thinking. This is an important determinant for the application of the FQF.

➤ ***POV:***

The report is a useful instrument for all interested parties that are not fully up-to-date with regard to the current situation of the FQF in Flanders.

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

To clarify the use of English translations of existing Flemish terms, the mostly used abbreviations and terms are included below.

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Dutch</i>
AgODi	Agency for Educational services	Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten
AHOVOS	Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Allowances	Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs en Studietoelagen
AKOV	Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training	Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming
AGIO _n	Agency for School Infrastructure	Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs
	Apprenticeship	Leertijd
KSO	Artistic secondary education	Kunstsecundair Onderwijs
HBO5	Associate degree	Hoger Beroepsonderwijs
BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group	
	Bridging Project	Schakeljaar
CBE	Centres for Adult Basic Education	Centra voor Basiseducatie
	Certificate	Certificaat - getuigschrift - attest
	Certificate for work experience	Ervaringsbewijs
CIPO	Context-Input-Process-Output	Context-Input-Proces-Output
	Compulsory education	Leerplicht
	Core curriculum	Basisvakken
CVO	Centre for Adult Education	Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie
GO!	Education of the Flemish Community	Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System	
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training	
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management	
EHEA	European Higher Education Area	
	Elementary education	Basisonderwijs
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	
EQAR	European Quality Assurance for Higher Education	
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework	
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	Europees kwalificatiekader
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance	
ESU	European Students Union	
EUA	European Universities' Association	
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education	
	External review	Externe evaluatie - Visitatie
	Final objective	Eindterm
SERV	Flanders Social and Economic Council	Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen

SYNTRA Vlaanderen	Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial training	Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemingsvorming
SYNTRA	Recognized centra for training of self-employed and SME's	Erkende centra voor vorming van zelfstandigen en kleine en middelgrote ondernemingen
VLIF	Flemish Agriculture Investment Fund	Vlaams Landbouwinvesteringsfonds
VLUHR	Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges	Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad
VLHORA	Flemish Council of University Colleges	Vlaamse Hogescholenraad
VLOR	Flemish Education Council	Vlaamse Onderwijsraad
VLIR	Flemish Interuniversity Council	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad
VDAB	Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service	Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling
FQF	Flemish Qualifications Framework	Vlaams kwalificatiekader
ASO	General secondary education	Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs
	Grade	Leerjaar
IAVA	Internal Audit of the Flemish Administration	Interne Audit van de Vlaamse Administratie
IBO	Individual Vocational In-company Training	Individuele Beroepsopleiding in de Onderneming
IVA	Internally autonomous agencies	Intern Verzelfstandigd Agentschap
	Modular certificate	Deelcertificaat
NQF	National Qualifications Framework	Nationaal kwalificatiekader
	Orientation certificate	Oriënteringsattest
DBSO	Part-time vocational education	Deeltijds Beroepssecundair Onderwijs
	Pre-primary education	Kleuteronderwijs
	Primary education	Lager onderwijs
	Professional competence profile	Beroepscompetentieprofiel
CLB	Pupil Guidance Centres	Centrum voor Leerlingen Begeleiding
EVC		
	Recognition of Acquired Competences = accreditation of prior learning	Erkennen van Verworven Competenties
EVK	Recognition of Acquired Qualifications	Erkennen van Verworven Kwalificaties
	School attendance	Schoolplicht
Se-n-se	Secondary after Secondary Education	Secundair na secundair
SME	Small and Midsized Entreprise	Kleine en middelgrote onderneming (KMO)
	Special education	Buitengewoon onderwijs
	Stage	Graad
TSO	Technical secondary education	Technisch Secundair Onderwijs
	University college	Hogeschool
VET	Vocational Education and Training	Beroepsopleiding en -onderwijs
BSO	Vocational secondary education	Beroepssecundair Onderwijs

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- <http://www.vlor.be>

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS

In addition to this brochure, the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training publishes several other publications.

For an overview, please visit the following website:
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