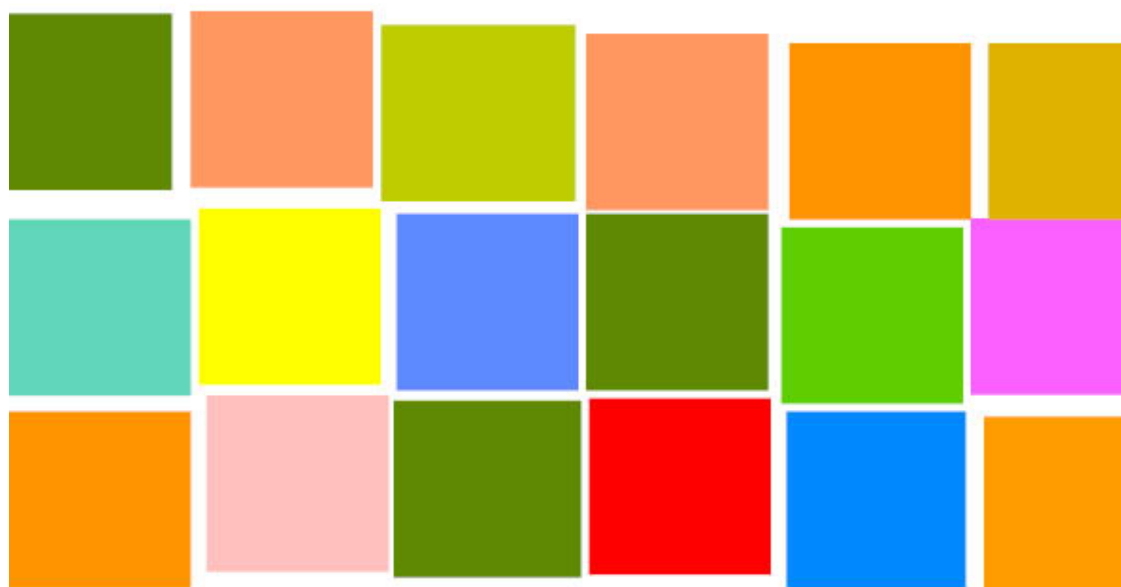


OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Country Background Report Flanders (Belgium)



Vrije
Universiteit
Brussel



CESOR



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The recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Flanders

Within the framework of concepts such as lifelong and lifewide learning and the recognition of acquired competences, there has always been a focus on non-formal and informal learning. This goes back as far as the year 2000, when the first real steps were made to develop a policy around lifelong and lifewide learning that considered the recognition of acquired competences (RAC). The question of how to recognise competences acquired outside of the formal education system was addressed as part of this process. Learning paths other than formal education were therefore part of the debate from the outset, included in the 'Een leven lang leren in goede banen' (2000) action plan and the subsequent 'Pact van Vilvoorde' (2001). These action plans were shaped around exploratory and descriptive research investigating how, where and why lifelong learning and RAC should be addressed in Flanders.

The findings from studies under the VIONA research programme (2001-2004) provide the basis of an integrated policy for lifelong learning. With the creation of DIVA (see chapter 2) as a coordinating body involving all relevant partners, the vision of lifelong and lifewide learning became something tangible in pilot projects, which took place in formal and non-formal learning contexts as part of RAC (started up in 2002). Lifelong learning is not something that can concentrate solely on labour market-driven competences, needs and requirements. It should also look at the competences, needs and requirements of the individual. The pilot projects provided the necessary input to gradually anchor the recognition of acquired competences in legislation in the three relevant policy areas (Education and Training; Work and Social Economy; and Culture, Youth, Sports and Media).

Meanwhile, a new Flemish Government was installed in July 2004. This led to new policy papers looking at LLL (lifelong learning) in general and at specific issues relating to education and training and the recognition of acquired competences. Closer cooperation on education and training policy is being sought between the departments responsible for education, work and culture, youth, sports.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is not strictly bound to any one specific policy area. In general, though, we can say that three policy areas are decisive for activities concerning non-formal and informal learning, namely: *Work and Social Economy, Education and Training* and *Culture, Youth, Sports and Media*. Two of the policy areas concerned, fall within the remit of the same minister, Frank Vandenbroucke (Vice-Prime Minister for the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for *Work, Education and Training*). This is in contrast to the previous term in which the responsibilities were split between two ministers. It reinforces the connection between *Work and Social Economy* on the one hand and *Education and Training* on the other. As far as the *Culture, Youth, Sports and Media* policy area is concerned, non-formal and informal learning are most relevant to Culture, Youth and Sports. These three policy aspects all fall within the remit of Bert Anciaux (Flemish Minister for Culture, Youth, Sports and Brussels Affairs). Minister Vandenbroucke and Minister Anciaux both indicate in their 2004-2009 policy document that cooperation between all training providers is necessary to lifelong and lifewide learning. Learning and the development of talents and competences are crucial in order to be able to meet the exacting requirements that

society imposes on each one of us. Learning and working come together not only at the moment that students become employed; it is an interaction that spans the whole career. The power of work, education and training are becoming increasingly convergent and even interwoven (e.g. the education/labour market link; work and lifelong learning). A new interdepartmental structure concerning all policy themes at the junction of Work, Education and Training is being developed. At the same time, the government is trying to reach new potential learners. The programme of action involves all ages and life spheres, including: compulsory education; training during an individual's working life; the integration of workplace learning; and social-cultural work, etc.

The new Flemish Government stresses following aspects of LLL as being crucial to maximizing every individual's talents in the best possible way: stimulating participation in LLL; developing partnerships in education and training; connecting education and the labour market; developing an effective training market; ensuring equal opportunities in education and training; developing structured career guidance; and the recognition of acquired competences.

In 2006, the "Competence Agenda" (competentie agenda) initiative was launched by the Flemish Minister for Work, Education and Training. The initiative maps the requirements for competence development and makes policy recommendations to tackle the skills gaps. Different stakeholders have been able to share their particular viewpoints during a series of roundtable discussions. An action plan for developing the competence of individuals and the competence policy of enterprises and in schools was drafted to enhance employability and increase both the employment rate and economic growth. Competence development will strengthen the ability of workers and enterprises to cope with a changing labour market. The action plan will be implemented by stakeholders from the educational field, employers' organisations, trade unions and the government. In search of further innovation, the Flemish Government is also implementing the action plan "Vlaanderen in actie" (Flanders in action), which includes several measures to foster innovation in education and training.

In early 2007, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Flanders is at an intermediate stage. The results from the pilot projects are still to be tested in practice and, at the same time, the first legislative steps are being taken. In the next phase, the lessons from various areas will be drawn together and policy will, once again, play its coordinating and integrating role. Around twenty stakeholders were interviewed on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning for this report. A general comment from the stakeholders was that, in the first years, there was negligible coordination from government. This meant that policy developed at different rates and that not enough was made of the differences between projects. From the collected data and our interviews with stakeholders, we have to conclude that the vision for recognition via non-formal and informal learning differs significantly across education, the labour market and the (socio-)cultural, youth and Sports sector. We can also confirm the warning expressed in the HIVA research in 2003 (Vanhoren, 2003), which made reference to the dangers inherent in divergent visions of learning and learning processes and stressed the importance of a common policy.

In drafting this report, we must point out that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Flanders is currently in a rather chaotic phase. The uncertainty is partly due to the lack of coordination, not only between the different policy areas (at government level), but also within the policy areas themselves (at intermediate level). This leads to a situation where numerous initiatives are taken at all levels targeting various aspects of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, such as the recognition of acquired competences, the building up of a portfolio, etc. This is, of course, also very positive in the sense that it means the subject is 'alive' in Flanders. It means that the importance of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is accepted at all levels and that there is a readiness to launch initiatives and projects to take the agenda forward.

The uncertainty around the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is further aggravated by a Babylonian confusion of language around definitions and concepts. In the execution of this report we were asked to draw a clear distinction between informal learning and non-formal learning. This difference is theoretically very clearly defined but, in practice, it has little, if any, relevance to stakeholders or is flatly disputed by them. For the sake of clarity we would refer the reader to the definitions of non-formal and informal learning (as formulated by the OECD).

- *Formal learning*: learning via an instruction programme within an educational establishment, a vocational training or skilling centre for adults, or on the job, that is usually recognized by a qualification of a certificate.
- *Non-formal learning* is learning via a programme that is usually not evaluated and does not lead to a certificate.
- *Informal learning* is learning that results from activities related to the job, family life or leisure time.

In this background report, we retain these distinctions wherever possible; although we inevitably have to discuss different forms of learning jointly at some points. We hope to emphasize that the boundaries between the different forms of learning and, more particularly, the definitions as formulated by the OECD, themselves create uncertainty.

From the interviews, it is also interesting to note that it was very difficult for most stakeholders to detach the recognition of non-formal and informal learning from the debate about the recognition of previously acquired competences in general. Practically all of the stakeholders felt that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning was the same as the recognition of acquired competences. In this report, the distinction is made, wherever possible, between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and recognition of the competences acquired in informal and in non-formal learning contexts. However, we are aware that we do not always succeed in that endeavour. This is largely because the recognition of learning per se and the recognition of the competences acquired in that learning context are connected to each other.

The large volume of initiatives and the prevalent uncertainty make it particularly difficult to provide an exhaustive picture at any moment of all initiatives in all policy areas and at all levels. During the writing of this report, we were regularly confronted with new developments on these subjects. We have tried to incorporate these developments as

far as possible. Last but not least, the report structure is dictated by the OECD format. Where we felt necessary, however, we have adapted this slightly in the interests of improved comprehension and clarity.

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ACRONYMS

BOIC	Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee
CBE	Centres for basic education
CVO	Centres for adult education
EVC	Recognition of Acquired Competences
EVK	Recognition of Acquired Qualifications
ESF	European Social Funds
FOV	Federation of organisations for (socio-cultural) adult education
HIVA	Research Institution about Labour and Labour Market
ISB	Institute for sports administration/management and recreation policy
JES	Youth and City
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLL	Lifelong Learning
NVAO	Dutch-Flemish accreditation agency
OSP	Continuing Education
SoCiuS	Support point for socio-cultural adult work
SYNTRA	Flemish Agency for entrepreneurship training
VDAB	Flemish Employment Agency
VFJ	(now: FORMAAT) Flemish federation of youth centres
Viona	Flemish Interuniversity Research Network for Labour Market Reporting
VLOR	Flemish Education Council
VRC	Flemish Saveguards Central
VSF	Federation of Flemish Sports Federations
VTS	Flemish (sports) Trainers' School

Note: a great variety in definitions is used to describe the policy and initiatives regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. When using an equivalent for the Dutch term EVC or *Erkenning van Verworven Competenties*, we use the term *Recognition of Acquired Competences (RAC)*, especially relating to mere policy matters, because it leans closest to the term and idea behind the term in the Dutch language and Flemish society. Throughout the text other terms are however used, notably because stakeholders are using these terms to indicate their proper initiatives.

APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
RAC	Recognition of Acquired Competences
RAS	Recognition of Acquired Skills
RNFIL	Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Chapter 1: Description of contextual factors

1.1. Demographic changes

In the first chapter, we were asked to outline a number of contextual factors that are likely to influence the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The first factor discussed is some radical demographic changes. Shifts in the population structure can, after all, have far-reaching consequences for the labour market, education and many other areas of society.

Moderate population growth is expected for Belgium, from 10.5 million people in 2006 to approximately 11 million in 2040. After this slight increase, a period of stabilisation is expected. In the Belgian context, Flanders has the lowest growth of the three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels Capital Region), from 6.10 million to around 6.15 million in 2040, followed by a slight decrease (Vlaanderen vergeleken, 2006).

1.1.1. Ageing

Ageing relates to both increasing life expectancy and to the ageing of the population. In terms of life expectancy, Belgium is among the top countries. Life expectancy in 2002 was 78.7 years, well above the world average (66.9 years) and also above the average for the countries of the OECD (77.1 years). In Belgium, life expectancy is highest in the Flemish Region, with a life expectancy in 2004 of 77.6 years for men and 82.9 years for women (Vlaanderen vergeleken, 2006).

The ageing of the population breaks down into having both fewer young people and more older people. Today, 18% of the population of Flanders are over 65 years old. In 2040 that figure will be 28%, placing Flanders somewhat above the average for the EU25.

The proportion of over 80 year olds in the population, in particular, is forecast to rise sharply, from 4% in Flanders now to 11% in 2050. The proportion of young people below 20 years of age will shrink from 22% now to 19.5% in 2050 (Vlaanderen vergeleken, 2006).

The consequences of ageing will probably hit Flanders hardest of all the Belgian regions. The balance between active and non-active parts of the population in Belgium will tip over faster and more markedly in Flanders than in Wallonia and in Brussels. The 'drying up' of the labour market will be felt first and most sharply in Flanders. The size of the professionally active age group (15-64 years) will decrease by around 180 000 people in the next 20 years.

The main policy tools to stimulate active ageing (for example, pension legislation and social security) belong to the federal government. However, the Flemish Government has introduced a number of initiatives that may promote active ageing, such as those for vocational training, employment services and outplacement (Appeltans e.a., 2005).

1.1.2. Migration

International migration is more or less under control in Belgium. In 2004, approximately 27 000 new immigrants (excluding asylum-seekers) were recorded, which amounts to 2.6% of the total population. The scale of immigration to the Flemish Region is somewhat lower, at 1.9%. Of all three regions, however, the Flemish Region takes in the most asylum-seekers (38 000 for Flanders, 19 000 for Wallonia and 27 000 for the Brussels Capital Region (Vlaanderen vergeleken, 2006).

1.1.3. New profiles in higher education

Migration and the ageing population will also change the profile of students after secondary education. The influence of migration has led to thought being given to immigrants or new Belgians (or Flemish people) with degrees from countries outside Belgium who connect with formal education in Flanders. However, the demand for a changing student profile after secondary education must not focus too narrowly on migration or on ageing in particular, but in the first instance on the **integration of new target groups** or on a new profile for higher education in general. This objective is also emphasised in the Flemish Government's action plan 'Pact van Vilvoorde' (see below). In the updated version of the Pact (2005), a target for the further democratisation of education is set for 2010. Children of parents of low educational attainment, in particular, have lower participation rates in higher education. The target level of participation in higher education for this group is 60% by 2010. We may also distinguish distinct new target groups. In its strategy for new target groups in education, the VLOR (2002) refers not only to the traditional disadvantaged groups, such as students from social and economical weaker environments, but also to students with disabilities, immigrant students, and to a number of less obvious target groups. By placing the problem in the context of lifelong learning, other adults present themselves as new target groups in higher education, such as: re-entrants; 'second-chancers'; highly-trained foreigners (e.g. refugees); and people looking for a second degree. In the academic year 2001-2002, the number of adults undertaking basic courses at universities was limited to 7.5% of the total student population. 'Adults' are defined as students older than 25 years. If we raise the age limit to 30 years, the figure drops to 2.4%. The percentage of adults is greater in advanced academic courses.

Supported by the decree of 28 July 2002 on equal opportunities in education, the Flemish educational establishments signed an declaration of intent in 2005, 'Diversiteit als meerwaarde' ('Diversity as added value'), to develop a structural diversity policy. Particular attention was paid to, and extra efforts made on behalf of, all groups that are currently under-represented in higher education. Work will be undertaken in this context alongside associations of higher educational institutes¹ for disadvantaged groups and immigrants, personnel organisations, social organisations and, of course, the student movement (VLOR, 2005; Vandenbroucke, 2006).

¹ An association in Flemish higher education is a link of cooperation between one university with one or more colleges of higher education.

1.2. Internationalisation

1.2.1. Influence of internationalisation on education, vocational training and skilling

In the European Union, the demand for a flexible and mobile workforce with good language and intercultural competences has grown out of the creation of the Single Market, which has led to the need for a European space for education and vocational training. The European Commission sets its goals for increasing the level of knowledge and competences of all European citizens explicitly in the context of employment. Mobility is the key concept of former Community educational programmes such as Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci, and is directed towards supporting the opening up of the extended labour market (Vandenbroucke, 2004b).

The EU Programme for Lifelong Learning was launched on 1 January 2007. The overarching objective of the EU programme of action in lifelong learning is to help build a modern, knowledge-based society in the Community. The programme provides impetus for exchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems across the Community, which aims to become a quality benchmark throughout the world.

In view of the Community educational programmes, more specifically Grundtvig, and in the context of the impact of internationalisation on education, vocational training and skilling, we should also mention the DEWBALAM-project. DEWBALAM stands for **Developing European Work Based Learning Approaches and Methods**. The objectives of the DEWBALAM-project are to:

- develop work based learning approaches and models in a range of local European cultural and institutional contexts
- create a European network of university and non-university partner institutions
- facilitate access to Higher Education qualifications for adult (employed) learners and disadvantaged groups through:
 - specially-designed systems of APEL (accreditation of prior and experiential learning - see chapter 3)
 - the development of innovative approaches to WBL (Work Based Learning) and blended learning methods
 - the partners defining a common core of basic approaches and good practice, set within specific national and local contexts, in order to identify patterns for APEL, the use of ODL (Open and Distance Learning) and the interaction between educational institutions, private companies, public organisations and social partners. This is a step towards a European WBL qualifications framework
 - the project making a significant contribution to Lifelong Learning by allowing adult learners to enhance their competences through individual learning
 - contributing to the development of local economies, promoting the creation of organisational learning, and thereby increase employability

The policy document (2004) from the Minister for Work, Education and Training made reference - in connection with the internationalisation of the educational landscape - to the globalisation of the economy. Globalisation intensifies international developments. The agendas of international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, UNESCO and the United Nations (UN) are becoming increasingly harmonised. This means that the impact of multilateral organisations on national policy in general and upon education policy in particular will increase.

Internationalisation also increases the need for recognition of degrees from other countries. The same policy document by Minister Vandenbroucke also makes reference to **cooperation treaties** with the Netherlands. Following that line of thought, steps were taken to facilitate the recognition of foreign degrees in higher education through the following three measures:

- The automatic reciprocal recognition of degrees conferred in Flanders and in the Netherlands through the creation of a joint higher education course register. We may refer here to the NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie or Dutch-Flemish accreditation agency), a public institution set up in both regions by treaty between the Netherlands and Flanders to guarantee the quality of higher education. On the basis of the Netherlands example, the same approach can be taken with other countries with which arrangements have been made regarding the reciprocal recognition of each other's accreditations.
- A flexible and simpler procedure for the recognition of degrees awarded in those countries that signed and ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) of the Council of Europe, on condition that those countries operate an equally good quality assurance system.
The Flemish Government will urge the Federal Government to charge the Permanent Representative of Belgium at the Council of Europe with the task of signing and ratifying the LRC. The Communities have already expressed their approval.
- The devising, in consultation with the Flemish Minister with responsibility for naturalisation, of a simple, yet precise procedure for the recognition of degrees awarded in the other countries.

The impact of internationalisation on education and vocational training will certainly not decrease in years to come. Focus must therefore be devoted to courses that are accessible, that are offered flexibly and that can swiftly anticipate the new qualification needs.

1.2.2. Incorporation of recognition practices in the integration policy for migrants

A first level of recognition practices in integrating migrants is the **recognition of acquired competences**. In 2003 DIVA (see Chapter 2) - in the framework of the project "Recognition of Acquired Competences" (RAC - Erkenning van Verworven Competenties) - subsidized a project for migrants, executed by the VDAB. Building up on the Saïda project (career guidance for migrants), an instrument was developed within

this project to measure the competences of migrants for three bottleneck occupations: maintenance electricians, residential electrotechnical fitters and electrotechnical industrial fitters.

The migrants' competences are measured at starting practitioner level. The test is constructed in a language-independent, culture-independent manner. This means that a visual, schematic and resolutely practical approach is used. This RAC procedure improves the migrant's chances of finding employment (ICEM, 2004).

A second level of recognition practices is the **recognition of acquired qualifications** (RAQ or Erkenning van Verworven Kwalificaties – EVK). Three procedures are currently in use for the recognition of foreign degrees: academic recognition, professional recognition and recognition of assessment of the level (ICEM, 2006).

The *academic recognition procedure* can be illustrated by the process for comparing a foreign course and a Flemish higher education course. NARIC-Vlaanderen (NARIC-Vlaanderen is the Flemish unit within the NARIC network of the European Economic Space) seeks the advice of at least two Flemish higher education institutions regarding the academic value of the foreign degree. The criteria applied are mentioned in the Flemish Government Decree of 14 October 1992 and in the Flemish Government Act of 10 June 1997. The academic recognition procedure is an official confirmation of the equivalence of 2 degrees. NARIC-Vlaanderen is responsible for running the procedure, while full recognition is given by the Head of the Department for Colleges or the Universities Department of the administrative department Higher Education and Scientific Research (Hoger Onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek).

Professional recognition authorises the holder of a relevant foreign degree to pursue a regulated profession in a host Member State of the European Economic Space.

Professional authorisation is a federal matter, with the exception of the educational professions, for which the Flemish Community has powers of its own. In that case, NARIC-Vlaanderen acts as an information and contact point. Depending on the duration of the course, either the agency for secondary education and part-time art education (Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten: AgODi), or the agency for higher education and adult education (Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs en Volwassenenonderwijs) has responsibility for the recognition of degrees. Flemish higher education establishments (Vlaamse Hoger Onderwijsinstellingen) have their own powers for application of the European Directive for education professionals at their institutions.

Finally, there is also the *level determination system*. A determination of level is a confirmation by NARIC-Vlaanderen that a given foreign higher education degree has actually been conferred by a recognised higher education establishment. Different agencies and employers in Belgium will accept a determination of level instead of academic recognition of a degree. In order to do this, NARIC-Vlaanderen requires a certified true copy of the degree accompanied by a valid translation. A determination of level is guaranteed within 4 weeks.

The table below gives a summary of the number of applications for *professional recognition* and for *determination of level*:

	Total applications	
	Professional recognition	Determination of level
2001	66	578
2002	62	721
2003	50	849
2004	70	1293
2005	62	1056

Source: ICEM (2006)

1.3. ICT

1.3.1. New competences in connection with ICT

In 2004, research was conducted on behalf of CEDEFOP on the certification of ICT competences in Europe. The research had three objectives:

1. Offering solutions and recommendations for current difficulties and problems relating to the certification of ICT competences at international and European level.
2. Finding ways of exchanging information and knowledge through future European networks.
3. Exploring the future role and contribution of different European organisations (e.g., CEDEFOP, CEPIS and CEN/ISSS).

The study shows that the demand for ICT competences in commerce and industry is constantly increasing. The ICT environment itself is changing at an ever-faster pace and, in the work context, employees find it increasingly difficult to keep up through vocational training courses and upskilling. These rapid developments are part of the reason why education does not always manage to impart the ICT competences necessary in the world of commerce and industry. We are therefore obliged to acquire those competences in an informal (and/or non-formal) way.

In 2004, eSCC published a report (eSCC, 2004) on the **vision of the world of commerce and industry** concerning the role of certification for (specific) ICT competences. It suggests that employers attach undue importance to certification and it stresses the need for flexibility in the learning of new ICT competences. In an employer-context, having good ICT competences is highly valued and offers an alternative to a hierarchical structure on the basis of formal education. In other words, the right to a particular position in the company is no longer measured only on the basis of the degrees that are obtained through formal education. The certification of ICT competences delivered by, for example, Microsoft, Cisco, Compaq and others also enjoy credibility, because they are based on a voluntary evaluation process whereby both knowledge and practice are measured against objective standards. (CEDEFOP, 2006:16)

The certification of ICT competences is, at the present moment, an important subject for CEDEFOP. The initial focus is on the **harmonisation of the certification of e-**

competences. The most important initiative in this connection is the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is an initiative of the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS, headquarters Ireland), to which the 'Federatie van Belgische Verenigingen voor Informatica' also belongs. The certificate is recognised in 139 countries and taught in 32 languages. Approximately 6 million people across Europe have already taken an ECDL course. Some colleges in Belgium grant a dispensation for holders of the ECDL certificate. In Belgium, the ECDL is offered in various schools and colleges, in the vocational training centres of the VDAB and FOREM and in various private training centres. In Flanders, there are currently 12 VDAB test centres (Antwerp, Beveren-Roeselare, Brussels, Genk, Heverlee, Oostkamp, Peer, Sint-Niklaas, Tongeren, Turnhout, Vilvoorde and Wommelgem) where competences for Windows, Word, Excel and other Office applications may be tested. The European Computer Driving Licence consists of seven test modules that must be successfully completed in an accredited test centre within three years. Anyone passing 4 of the 7 tests receives the "starter degree". With the ECDL, the individual user can show that he or she has reached a particular standard in relation to computer competences.

The European Computer Driving Licence is a useful instrument for employers, who do not always know clearly as part of recruitment procedures whether candidates possess sufficient computer knowledge or skills. The European Computer Driving Licence offers a standard that gives a guarantee that the employee will be able to perform most tasks.

The Flemish Parliament recently approved (2006), common standards for ICT education at particular levels in formal education. They apply to all students from primary education and first grade secondary education from 1 September 2007.

1.3.2. The idea of an e-portfolio

The e-portfolio is an important instrument for the individual to bundle all his or her competences. Ideally, an e-portfolio would contain all competences regardless of whether they were acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning. The term portfolio will recur several times throughout this report, but not all initiatives based around portfolios are e-portfolios. The introduction and composition of portfolios is regarded as one of the most important elements in most initiatives around RAC. The government also attaches great importance to the subject and supports the development of a coherent RAC policy through defining common principles for portfolios in the fields of education, work and culture (see Chapter 2: the competence agenda).

In higher education, the associations have offered all students the possibility to work with an e-portfolio since the academic year 2004-2005.

In general, however, the e-portfolio in Flanders is still in the development phase. In various areas, steps have been taken towards the development of an e-portfolio. Below we cite some of the more important initiatives and pilot projects. However, in the first instance, these approaches combine the competences that were acquired in a specific domain.

Below we explore the most important initiatives and pilot projects in greater detail.

Mijn Loopbaan

'**Mijn Loopbaan**' (My career) is an e-portfolio project developed by the VDAB. In cooperation with the Vocational Training Division (Dienst Beroepsopleiding - DBO) within the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, a *personal development portfolio* named 'My Digital Me' was developed within the broader concept of 'Mijn Loopbaan'. It offers 14 to 18-years old students the possibility of presenting his/her own abilities, language competences, key competences and interests. In other words, it provides the opportunity to get to know the student better and assess him or her in the fullest sense. A strength-weakness analysis provides the basis for the individual to develop and formulate personal objectives. The development component, based on the Deming circle or the PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act), allows planning and tracking, mapping the extent to which formulated goals have been reached. A prototype of the instrument 'My Digital Me' will be tested in various schools starting November 2007, so that a functional instrument may be available online by early 2008.

Starting from 'My Digital Me', a showcase portfolio or a kind of passport for the future can be derived. Here the individual can put together his or her own profile. The passport offers the opportunity to compile, publish or send a specific CV.

Thanks to the concept of 'Mijn Loopbaan', everyone will be able to track his or her own development. People can also learn how to reflect and to make more informed choices. It informs decision-making between different interests and also heightens awareness of the individual's own abilities. When the step to the labour market, university or college is then taken, a solid foundation will already have been laid regarding self-reflection and self-development.

Europass - Flanders

The **Europass** is a uniform instrument to make competences and abilities clearly and readily recognisable in Europe (European Union, EFTA/EES and candidate members) and thereby increase mobility (for work and study) across Europe. Europass is a **collection folder** in which **five documents** (Europass CV, Europass language passport, Europass Mobility, Europass Diploma Supplement and Europass Certificate Supplement) may be kept. The Europass CV and the Europass Language Passport must be completed by the individual. The other three documents are issued by the relevant authorities. The Europass collection folder exists in electronic and printed formats. The electronic folder can be found on the VDAB website. The printed folder can be obtained from the organisations that issue the Europass Diploma Supplement, the Europass Certificate Supplement or Europass Mobility.

The Europass is supported by a network of National Europass Centres, which are active in the different Member States.

Youth portfolio and C-sticks:

The Flemish Government (Youth Department) is represented in the Directorate for Youth in the Council of Europe. This Directorate for Youth is currently working on a European model for a **youth portfolio** with the intention of developing a basic portfolio on which additional components may be added by the Member States. A pilot project has just

started in Flanders to research how management training in youth work could be made to fit in a possible RAC scenario.

In the context of youth work, there is also the C-sticks project. C-sticks (“competence sticks”) is a project by JES², financed by the European Social Fund (Objective 3, focal point 4). In the project, an instrument is developed that will allow young people to map their transversal competences, develop them further and have them appraised. The target group for the e-portfolio are volunteers in youth work in urban areas, young job-seekers and JES workers. The diversity of the target groups (in background, educational attainment) and the fact that they are based in different settings (training, youth work, non-profit) guarantees a broad applicability. The extended JES practice in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent (with a wide range of young volunteers and job-seekers) functions as a laboratory space. The applied method uses a digital format (portfolio on USB stick). This competence stick can be continuously updated and adjusted. The focus is on overcoming of linguistic barriers, learning through experience, peer education and the development of competences using ICT.

1.4. Socio-economic developments and challenges on the labour market

Before looking at socio-economic developments and the challenges that relate to the labour market in Flanders, we present some figures on the socio-economic profile of Flanders. The total of active age population is 4.016.567 (average number in 2006).

Table: Active age population (15-64 years)

	%
15-24 years	17,9 %
25-49 years	53,7 %
50-64 years	28,4 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Table: Active age population by skill level

	%
Low skilled	33,8 %
Medium skilled	38,1 %
High skilled	28,1 %

Source: LFS, 2006

² JES (Jeugd en Stad) is a youth service that organizes all kinds of activities for children and young people, and provides information and advice to children and young people. They focus on participation, space, urban play and children's living space.

Table: Active age population by nationality

	%
Belgian	94,7 %
EU25-nationality	3,3 %
Non-EU25-nationality	2,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

The employment rates for these groups are as follows.

Table: Employment rate by age (15-64 years)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
15-24 years	34,4 %	32,6 %	32,8 %	31,8 %	32,0 %
25-49 years	84,2 %	83,2 %	84,9 %	85,6 %	85,8 %
50-64 years	40,6 %	42,1 %	43,8 %	45,9 %	46,3 %
Total	63,5 %	62,9 %	64,3 %	64,9 %	65,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Table: Employment rate by skill level (15-64 years)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Low skilled	45,1 %	44,4 %	44,3 %	43,7 %	43,1 %
Medium skilled	68,8 %	68,3%	69,0 %	69,9 %	69,8 %
High skilled	84,2 %	83,8 %	84,8 %	84,9 %	84,7 %
Total	63,5 %	62,9 %	64,3 %	64,9 %	65,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Table: Employment rate by nationality (15-64 years)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Belgians	64,2 %	63,7 %	64,9 %	65,4 %	65,6 %
Non-EU25-nationality	37,5 %	35,5 %	38,5 %	41,9 %	40,6 %
Total	63,5 %	62,9 %	64,3 %	64,9 %	65,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

As for unemployment across these groups, the distribution is as follows.

Table: Unemployment rates by age (15-64 years)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
15-24 years	11,6 %	15,5 %	13,6 %	14,2 %	12,5 %
25-49 years	4,2 %	4,9 %	4,6 %	4,6 %	4,0 %
50-64 years	3,8 %	3,3 %	4,2 %	4,3 %	4,8 %
Total	4,9 %	5,7 %	5,4 %	5,5 %	5,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Table: Unemployment rates by skill level (15-64 years)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Low skilled	7,2 %	8,7 %	7,9 %	9,0 %	8,6 %
Medium skilled	4,9 %	5,7 %	5,7 %	5,2 %	4,6 %
High skilled	3,1 %	3,1 %	3,4 %	3,3 %	3,1 %
Total	4,9 %	5,7 %	5,4 %	5,5 %	5,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Table: Unemployment rates by nationality (15-64 years)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Belgians	4,5 %	5,3 %	5,1 %	5,1 %	4,6 %
Non-EU25-nationality	25,3 %	27,3 %	25,4	24,0 %	25,2 %
Total	4,9 %	5,7 %	5,4 %	5,5 %	5,0 %

Source: LFS, 2006

1.4.1. Economic policy in connection with competences

The recognition of acquired competences is routinely presented as the instrument to make human capital visible and transferable. Policy in Flanders is very much shaped by that fact. Across the policy areas *Work and Social Economy* and *Education and Training*, much attention has therefore been paid to the alignment between education and the labour market. Generally speaking, government wants to come up with answers to two pressing social questions:

- 1) How to better align individual competences to the demand for competences in the labour market?
- 2) How to give disadvantaged people more opportunities in the labour market?

The recognition of acquired competences offers various possibilities in both cases. A first step requires a change of mentality whereby a 'degree-driven' approach makes way for an approach based on competences. A second step is learning to think in the context of lifelong learning. Flemish policy has taken both of these steps and is working on different areas of a policy to create a context in which these steps become reality, for example, initiatives around life/career pathways and coaching. One important factor is the interaction between education and work. This has also been (and is being) picked up and developed by the Flemish Government through the development of initiatives such as on-the-job training, part-time secondary vocational education and the qualification structure for making competences visible and transparent.

1.4.2. Policy in the context of economic and social inequality

In 2005, an average 64.9% of Flemings of professionally active age (15 to 64 years) were employed. This is a slight increase compared to 2004 (64.3%). The **level of employment in Flanders** therefore remains above the average employment level in Belgium (61.1%) and in the European Union (63.8%), although it is still below the average level for EU 15. Both the Flemish Government and the European Commission

are working towards an employment level of 70% by 2010. Employment rates in Flanders rose by 1.5 percentage points over 5 years (2001-2005). At this rate, the target set for 2010 (70%) is not feasible; it will not be reached until after 2020. An accelerated increase in employment levels in Flanders will therefore be necessary during the next years.

One of the paths being explored in order to reach this goal is increasing the accessibility of the labour market for specific target groups that are currently underrepresented. These are mostly the "disadvantaged groups" (older people over 50 years of age, people with disabilities, immigrants, the low-skilled) occupying an unusually precarious position on the labour market.

The relevant initiatives here fall within the scope of the 'Multijob plan'. The most recent such **Flemish multijob plan** "Samen voor meer banen" ("Together for More Jobs" - January 2006) consists of the strengthening of earlier employment creation measures plus a series of new initiatives (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2006b).

Older people +50 years

The level of employment among **the over-50s** increased in 2005, albeit less noticeably than in 2004. In Flanders, the 55-64 age group experiences particular difficulty staying in the labour market. In Flanders, 30.7% of 55 to 64-year olds are in employment. Participation in employment of 55 to 64-years olds is higher in Wallonia and in Brussels (resp. 32.3% and 39.8%). The European average for this age group is 42.5%. What is more, the disparity with the European average increased in 2004, so the European target of 50% by 2010 will be difficult to reach. As in most European countries, the number of people between 55 and 64 years of age is systematically growing (see 1.1). Action has been taken to promote the employment of older people, and the services of businesses and organisations have been enlisted to support action.

Eager to support and promote an age-aware personnel policy in commerce and industry, the Minister gave the Department of Work and Social Economy the task of setting up the **expertise centre Age and Employment**. The centre encourages the exchange of good practice for age-aware personnel policy between companies.

The placement figures also seem to reveal that older people accounted for barely 4% of job applications in 2005, whereas they form nearly 20% of the job-seeking population. On 1 April 2006, the **employment bonus** was therefore introduced for the over-50s. This is a labour cost subsidy for employers who engage a job-seeker of 50 years of age or more under a contract of indefinite duration and who then keep those people employed for at least 5 quarters. An employer would be entitled to the subsidy for 12 months; the amount would vary between 400 and 1 000 euros per month, depending on the gross wage of the newly recruited older employee. On an annual basis, the benefit for the employee may therefore amount to 12 000 euros.

An estimated 2 500 older job-seekers a year found employment before the introduction of the employment subsidy. With the introduction of the employment subsidy, the aim is to increase the number of job applications to 3 750 per year - an increase of 50%. To achieve this, 22 million euros was made available in 2006 and, from 2007, when the measure is fully rolled out, there will be an annual 30 million euros available.

The measure will be evaluated 2 years after implementation (early 2008). The government will investigate whether the subsidy actually led to extra applications among employers and whether the recruited older employees remained in service for more than one year. If necessary, the measure will be adjusted with reference to that evaluation in consultation with the social partners. During late 2006, the idea was also raised of introducing a similar measure for other target groups. Similarly, the suitability and feasibility of widening the eligibility for enterprises was investigated in spring 2007 on the basis of an initial evaluation of the use of the employment subsidy.

In order to further increase the employment share of the over-50s, older job-seekers are encouraged through the start-up of the **ervaringsclubs** ("experience clubs" - VDAB). As arranged in the Multijob Plan, from July 2006 the newly registered older job-seeker is systematically called to an obligatory, collective information session after the 3rd month of unemployment. He or she can then be sent for individual, customised career guidance in the purpose-built VDAB 'experience clubs'. Every older job-seeker is free to make use of this tailored guidance. Since 2006, an additional 5 million euros has been released for customised courses for older job-seekers. This budget pays for 25 extra job coaches and 50 extra consultants in the experience clubs.

Immigrants

The employment share of **immigrants** again increased sharply in 2005, rising to 41.9% (+3.4 ppt.), but, once more, Flanders does not perform well compared with Europe (average 55.9 %). The disparity *vis-à-vis* the European average (EU25) may well have become slightly smaller in recent years, but no Member State of the EU performs quite as poorly in this area. Despite the general downturn in the numbers of unemployed, the number of immigrant unemployed continues to rise (among the under-50s and the over-50s alike). By late 2005, there were 1 200 more immigrants unemployed than during the previous year. The share of immigrants in the job-seeking population thereby increased from 16% to 17% (Van Brempt, 2006).

Two structural EAD (Evenredige Arbeidsdeelname en Diversiteit, i.e., "Proportional Participation in Employment and Diversity") projects were developed jointly with the relevant federations to increase the participation in employment of immigrants. The project **Work-up** by the 'Forum van Etnisch Culturele Minderheden', the 'Unie van Turkse Verenigingen (UTV)' and the 'Federatie van Marokkaanse Verenigingen (FMV)' evolved into the immigrants and employment taskforce "Immigrants and Work" (Allochtonen en Arbeid) with the tasks of representing immigrants in policy and advisory forums (e.g. Commissie Diversiteit) and optimising feedback and the provision of information to the grassroots membership.

8 activation consultants or guides are now attached by protocol to eight federations of immigrant associations. In future they will focus exclusively on steering hard-to-place immigrant job-seekers to the services of the VDAB or directly to the labour market. Each guide has the objective of steering 75 immigrant job-seekers. Finally, a large number of immigrant job-seekers will also be reached through the Youth Unemployment **action plan** (see below).

Besides the above initiatives for immigrants, attention has also been paid to participation in employment as part of the naturalisation courses for (non-Belgian) migrants. A distinction is made here between primary naturalisation and secondary courses. The primary naturalisation course features a made-to-measure training programme that may consist of the following components:

- Social orientation (60 to 80 hours)
- Basic course in Dutch as a second language (for the highly skilled 120 hours, for the low-skilled 180 hours)
- Career guidance

After the primary course the migrant may choose a secondary course (a “face-fitting” or integration course) with:

- Educational perspective
- Social perspective
- Professional perspective

This opens up the right and (for some) the obligation to naturalize to more people, to recent migrants and to some categories of “oldcomers”³. The integration courses for recent migrants with other languages and for oldcomers attempt to provide a supply that covers actual needs. This is part of the pursuit of a individualised approach whereby every person looking for employment is given suitable coaching and, if necessary, suitable opportunities for vocational training. During a primary naturalisation course with social orientation and language lessons, the VDAB provides the migrant with career guidance that has a professional perspective.

The VDAB naturalisation consultant has a twofold assignment before the start of the naturalisation course:

- determining distance from the labour market;
- researching the extent to which (extended-limited) career guidance is necessary.

The VDAB caters to the needs of non-Dutch-speakers by deploying its own ‘Dutch as second language’ (Nederlands tweede taal-NT2) teachers and by contracting-out (to the Centra voor Basiseducatie en Onderwijs voor Sociale Promotie) of NT2 courses for the linguistic support of vocational training and placement courses for non-Dutch-speakers. Some 6 987 NT2 actions were started in 2005. Between late June 2005 and late June 2006, at least 60% of the non-Dutch newcomers were streamed out of unemployment. This is an increase of almost 4 percentage points in comparison with the previous year. It constitutes an outflow into employment for 44.7% of the total group, an increase of 5 percentage points on the previous year.

People with disabilities

In 2002, only 45.7% of **people with disabilities** were in employment. The movement in the number of people with disabilities still interested in employment would seem to indicate that their position in the labour market is none the better for it. In late August

³ “Oldcomers” are non-Dutch-speaking older legal immigrants in Belgium who have a socio-cultural origin in a state that is not a member of the European Union.

2006, Flanders had 27 802 disabled job-seekers; representing an annual increase of approximately 800 (+3%).

The VDAB had developed a model for adding-on **specialist coaching** for job-seekers who are disabled. This model will be fully implemented during the course of 2007. It will be complemented - by the disabled person, himself or herself - by the approach to the target group embodied in the policy of the Department for Work and Social Economy.

The structural EAD project (Evenredige Arbeidsdeelname en Diversiteit, "Proportional Participation in Employment and Diversity") by **Gelijke Rechten voor Iedere Persoon met een Handicap (GRIP)** (\approx "Equal Opportunities for All People with a Disability") and **Gebruikersoverleg Handicap & Arbeid** offers organisational and content support to consumer organisations and individual experts involved in the Commissie Diversiteit - i.e., the VDAB stakeholders' forum - and to the working party in the VDAB after the transfer of the professional integration powers from the Vlaams Fonds to the Work policy area.

The GRIP structural project also includes the development of a **helpdesk** for people with a professional disability and a further component covering the circulation of information, raising public awareness, and vocational training and skilling for the many Policy stakeholders.

Young people with low educational attainment

At 32%, the relative participation in employment of young Flemish **male adults** (15-24 years) is extremely low. The participation of low-skilled, young male adults dipped even further in 2005. This figure may be partially explained by a higher involvement of young men in (higher) education. If we leave students out of the equation, young male adult participation suddenly rises to somewhere near 80%.

Table: Educational attainment (% of youngsters (20-24 years) having obtained qualification of higher secondary education)⁴

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Male	83,5 %	81,1 %	82,3 %	81,5 %
Female	87,8 %	86,4 %	87,7 %	88,8 %
Total	85,6 %	83,7 %	84,9 %	85,1 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Table: Early school leavers (% of youngsters 18-24 years with no qualification of higher secondary education and not following any course or not participating in any training)

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Male	14,4 %	14,8 %	13,3 %	13,2 %
Female	8,8 %	10,2 %	8,7 %	8,0 %
Total	11,7 %	12,5 %	11,0 %	10,7 %

Source: LFS, 2006

Certain groups of young Flemish male adults nonetheless experience difficulty accessing the labour market. A hard core of chronically hard-to-place unemployed young adult

⁴ European benchmark = 85 %

males remain unable to haul themselves out of unemployment by their own devices. The fairly constant number of low-skilled and unusually long-term (+2 years) jobless young men would seem to hint as much. At present, targeted actions (Youth Unemployment action plan - 2005) has been set up in 13 cities, towns and municipalities where youth unemployment is most acute.

The **action plan Youth Unemployment** addresses the low-skilled young job-seeker (< 25 years). The 13 areas covered 40% of the potential target group. They are also characterised by relatively high numbers of non-Flemish/non-Belgian people among the unemployed. The targeted approach to the hard core of young jobless is therefore also in step with the approach for immigrant job-seekers.

A covenant was concluded with each of the 13 entities in late 2005 mapping out actions for the vocational training and coaching of low-skilled young job-seekers. The intention here is not to offer these young people longer vocational training courses, but rather to develop a more demand-driven approach with, for instance, more job application technique training, attitude training, Dutch language lessons, on-the-job Dutch sessions, job hunting, job coaching and the provision of made-to-measure jobs. Employers are also involved and encouraged to undertake to provide sufficient vacancies for young people. Action has also been undertaken within the Social Economy. A new action plan Youth Unemployment with new lines of integrated action was adopted by the Flemish Government on 4 December 2007.

A lump sum of 6.1 million euros was raised up for vocational training and coaching in the context of the action plan for 2006 and 2007. The VDAB, as director of the action plan for youth unemployment, was given the task of outreach to 60% of the total target group (under-25s, low-skilled unemployed). Over and above this, 50% of these young people must be streamed out of unemployment 6 months after completion of the plan. For the successful achievement of these aims, the VDAB relies on the expertise and know-how of local actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youth and immigrants' organisations.

The **Vlaams Meerbanenplan** (Flemish Multijob Plan, see above) netted jobs for 200 extra starters. These starters (under-26, low-trained, unemployed) are deployed in schools under the banner of the existing **JOJO project** (Schools for Youth - Youth for Schools). Under that scheme, young people from secondary schools are employed in the prevention of antisocial behaviour. They represent extra support for the existing school personnel. The goal of the project is twofold: (i) to do something about the unqualified school-leavers and (ii) to meet collective needs by combating truancy, building bridges to immigrant communities and maintaining and renovating schools.

In the context of unemployment, it is also important to mention the **"Screening Job-seekers on Literacy"** project. The Literacy Competences Screening Project was created by the 'Vlaams Ondersteuningscentrum Voor de Basiseducatie' (VOCB) in 2004. The VOCB is a Flanders-wide agency whose purpose is to provide support to the centres for adult basic education (BCEs). The project was a response to International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) data which revealed that 17 percent rate of adults in Flanders had poor literacy. The project was designed to significantly increase the participation of illiterate Flemish-speakers in centres for adult basic education through the use of a literacy screening process in government-sponsored work learning centres - known as

VDAB *Workshops* (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding Werkwinkels) The screenings were followed, where needed, by referrals to centres for adult basic education. (VOCB-VDAB, 2007)

1.4.3. Using the recognition of non-formal and informal learning to support access to occupations

The development of the certificate of experience is informed by a vision to open up the labour market for disadvantaged groups (the low-skilled, i.e., with at best a secondary school-leaving certificate, the over-45s, people with disabilities and immigrant families) and thus reducing social inequality. The criteria for selecting occupations for which a certificate of experience is developed are, *inter alia*, the potential for access for disadvantaged groups (older people over 50 years of age, people with disabilities, immigrants, the low-skilled), the presence of bottleneck vacancies and a sufficiently large basis among the social partners. The intention here is to reach a mix of occupations, sectors and levels of ability.

Each year a list of selected occupations or sub-occupations is drawn up for which a certificate of experience may be awarded. Selection is based on the recommendation of the social partners and on the basis of clear criteria.

The procedure for conferring a certificate of experience is already in place for bus drivers, coach drivers, outside-school-hours child care workers, call centre operators, industrial painters and tower crane operators. New occupations are regularly added to the list.. Since early 2007, there are also test centres for hairdressers, hairdresser saloon managers, removals packers and removals carriers. As from November 2007, procedures for around 7 new occupations will have been implemented.

More **decentralised initiatives** can be found, for instance, in the medical care sector. In the project "Learning and assessment" (Leren en Assessment) (LEA, 2006 (DBO-Vlaamse Gemeenschap)) a RAC procedure was developed as part of the training programme and going up to 4th degree nurse level. It can shorten the study period. The fact that the nurse's training up to 4th degree BSO (Vocational education) is modular allows candidates to shorten one or more modules via a RAC procedure. The modular course is advantageous for the target group, allowing candidates to follow a course at his or her own tempo and in a flexible manner.

The three major phases of a RAC procedure, namely identification, assessment and recognition, are mapped out in the LEA project. Using a portfolio method and an assessment, candidates can show which competences they have acquired. Furthermore, candidates with foreign (non-Belgian) languages can carry out a self-assessment of their use of Dutch. An additional assessment makes it possible for the assessors to reach a reasoned decision.

1.5. Social developments

1.5.1. Recognition of new competences in the context of the knowledge society

Looking at new competences in the knowledge society and at forms of “literacy”, in practice means that we are thinking about knowledge and use of ICT. In recognition of the received wisdom about ICT (except for education), Flanders saw fit to comply with the European Computer Driving Licence (see 1.3.1.).

Digital literacy also relates to the ability to use digital technologies, means of communication and/or networks in order to gain access to, to manage, to integrate, to evaluate and even to create one’s own information within that knowledge-based society.

The world system and globalisation also means that languages are increasingly important. The specific competences and abilities in this context must, in turn, be recognised and drawn on the map. One important instrument to those ends, as already pointed out (1.3.2.), is the (e-)portfolio. Given the importance attached to command of languages, the Flemish **Taalportfolio** for adults was developed by the Flemish Community Department for Education against the backdrop of the Europees Jaar van de Talen - European Languages Year (2001). Language portfolios that fully meet the Council Europe directives are assigned by the European validation commission and may bear the logo of the Council of Europe. The Flemish pilot version was adjusted in 2006 to bring it completely into line with those directives. The objectives of the Taalportfolio are a logical continuation of the objective of the Council of Europe in connection with the learning of modern languages. Learning each other’s languages is supposed to promote understanding between the citizens of Europe. The important thing here is due respect for the rich diversity of cultures and languages in Europe.

The language portfolio is a triptych: a language passport, a language biography and a language dossier. The language passport shows a person’s linguistic competences as regards comprehension, reading, verbal communication and writing. The language biography has two basic elements, i.e., a personal account of what the language-user has learnt, and his or her strategies for learning other languages. The holder of the portfolio keeps in the dossier anything he or she might need to support what has included in the language passport and biography (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2006).

In terms of lifewide learning, social trends and developments also require the acquisition and the recognition of new competences. The **learning booklet (leerboekje)** is a useful instrument for the recognition and stock-taking of competences in the lifewide sphere. The learning booklet is a portfolio in which knowledge, talent, ability and competences acquired in a non-formal or informal learning environment in a particular (socio-)cultural sector are recorded (see Chapter 3). In future the learning booklet will have to integrate the different instruments in a coherent manner. In his policy letter ‘Cultuur 2006-2007’ Minister Anciaux announced that, in his opinion, the learning booklet should be one of the priorities of the ministerial committee Education, Training and Work.

1.5.2. Influence on democracy and citizenship

To what extent do the abilities and competences, necessary to function within today's knowledge-based society, have an influence on democracy and citizenship? As things stand, whether recognition of acquired ICT knowledge contributes in any way, manner or form to democracy and to citizenship remains an open question. Various studies point to the danger of a two-tier society based on use or non-use of ICT. The access thresholds for the use of the computer and internet will have to be 'socially corrected' to prevent the digital gap from becoming the new primary inequality of the 21st Century. (SoCiuS, 2006)

This fear is given statistical grounding when we see that the chance of a citizen using the internet for all applications (except downloading computer games and music) increases according to the level of educational attainment. E-learning outside of traditional education is an instrument for home study, but would appear to be more used by the middle and high educational achievers in EU15 than in Flanders. These ICT applications are less popular among underachievers. The obvious reason is that these applications assume a certain intellectual aptitude. (Vlaanderen vergeleken, 2006)

Since Flanders does not have the necessary indicators to measure ICT literacy, we turn to the use of PCs and the internet among adults. Owning and using PCs and internet increases year on year. In 2005, around half of the inhabitants of Flanders were regular users of a PC, although less than half also used the internet. Use of the PC and internet was more widespread among those in employment (and among young people and high achievers). Three quarters of those in employment used a PC regularly, while six out of ten regularly used the internet. The need to develop indicators for measuring ICT literacy is now more urgent than ever before, in order to form a clearer idea of the ICT competences of adults and in order to guarantee more up-to-date monitoring (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2005).

However, democracy and citizenship are not promoted solely by the use or the non-use of a PC. They also have – and have much more - to do with political and social participation and integration, personal development, social commitment and so forth. The recognition of labour market-driven competences acquired via non-formal and informal learning paths is, in any case, important not only for the social integration of disadvantaged groups, but also for the **life wide** competences that are equally important for the individual and for society. And it is precisely the development of these life-wide competences that is at the core of socio-cultural work.

1.6. Other

In this section we consider the contextual factors that influence the present state of play around the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. More specifically, we discuss the policy vision and initiatives from the previous legislature that formed the basis for developments in the political and legal arena during the present legislature.

1.6.1. Action plan “Een leven lang leren in goede banen”

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning must be put in the context of wider developments in lifelong and lifewide learning. In Flanders, lifelong and lifewide learning policy took shape from “Een leven lang leren in goede banen” (≈ “Lifelong learning on the right lines” – 2000, see also the introduction). With this action plan, the previous Flemish Government hoped to kick-start the development of an integrated policy on lifelong learning. An integrated approach means that policy is developed through partnership at various levels and with different players, with the government acting as catalyst. The ‘recognition of acquired competences’, or RAC, was only one aspect of the action plan. Others included education-to-labour-market transitions, training credits, careers guidance and administration, stimulating vocational training policy in enterprise, the alignment of the vocational training landscape, the development of ICT, and the knowledge-based economy. (Vanhoren, 2002)

Under this action plan, and in the context of the VIONA programme, research started in October 2000 on ‘Models and practices of (re-)identification of acquired competences’. This VIONA research was conducted in active cooperation with the government (cabinets and departments Education, Work and Economy) and the inter-professional social partners in a ‘RAC working group’. The working group was formed in autumn 2000. It consisted of research staff, representatives of the cabinets for employment, education and the economy, the administrative department for employment and the administrative department for education, the concerned VOIs (Vlaamse Openbare Instellingen – Flemish Public Institutions), VIZO and VDAB, the social partners and the consultation bodies SERV and VLOR (see chapter 4).

The RAC working group’s activities yielded advice for a minimum framework for the implementation of a RAC policy model in Flanders. Below, we outline each of the recommendations of the working group, because they constitute an important framework for further developments in RAC.

Legal and ethical setting

- Concrete and feasible projects must be started and evaluated in consultation with the social partners and education circles. The development of the projects requires sufficient attention to be paid to ethical aspects. Evaluation of the projects will then serve as the basis for examining how a framework may be established for RAC through decree;
- measures for protecting privacy and personal integrity are necessary, e.g., in the form of a code of conduct for the relevant organisations and supervision of the applied procedures and instruments;
- aspects such as the equal treatment of individuals and non-discrimination do not require monitoring only for the RAC procedure, but also for accessibility of the provisions available for RAC;
- the introduction of a RAC procedure, with the different steps of coaching, assessment and recognition, is not possible without an associated financial framework;
- thought must be given to the accessibility of the system in terms of the visibility, proximity and affordability of services for the individual;

- targeted publicity must accompany the implementation of the system, especially for specific groups;
- use of RAC must be encouraged by a short, simple RAC procedure.

Only a limited number of initiatives have yet been taken forward regarding the legal and ethical setting for RAC. In the next chapter we are looking in more detail at the legal framework that has been created. The ethical aspect is not yet in any way highly developed. However, rules of professional conduct have been drawn-up for coaches and assessors of the certificates of experience that must be observed during the period of active professional service.

Monitoring and evaluation

- a monitoring system is essential for the tracking, evaluation and improvement of the system;
- monitoring is necessary for the coordination of RAC initiatives in the various fields and sectors;
- a monitoring system must be simple and flexible.

Despite these recommendations, nothing is being done at the present moment regarding the monitoring and coordination of RAC initiatives. In the course of this background report, stakeholders repeatedly pointed out that the lack of such monitoring and coordination is felt to be one of the major barriers to the recognition of acquired competences.

Supervision and quality assurance

- the qualifications-acquired-earlier/elsewhere track must be developed together with the RAC track: the recognition of vocational training courses and training institutions is based on a quality label determined by the government;
- national standards with cross-sectoral and sectoral competences are essential for the attainment of a broad, formal societal shift in the recognition of acquired competences;
- one important factor for the quality of standards is clear responsibility for coordination and quality control;
- quality requirements regarding procedures and instruments include reliability and validity;
- the professional expertise of coaches and assessors is guaranteed by the recognition or accreditation of coaching and assessment agencies, special attention being paid to the training, qualification and independence of coaches and assessors.

All concerned see supervision and quality control as important aspects for the further development of RAC and for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Here, again, however, we must report that most of that recommendation are not in practice yet.

Institutional framework

- coaching and assessment authorities in a RAC procedure are recognised with reference to recognition criteria, including a code of conduct and professional expertise;
- independent coaching, assessment and recognition are necessary for the objectivity of a RAC system and for the protection of privacy
- independent coaching, assessment and recognition do not necessarily take place in separate organisations and, consequently, may equally well take place in a single organisation - which supports the accessibility, simplicity and transparency of the procedure for the individual;
- recognition and certification are awarded by a body or agency that answers to official rules: a government body or agency authorised to confer study certificates of an accredited assessment body or agency;
- supervision and control are government tasks;
- a 'RAC Advisory Group' may also be set up for monitoring at policy level, and for advice concerning RAC for relevant partners and for the government;
- a 'Coordination Cell' can be set up for executive purposes for the coordination and implementation of RAC in the field, and monitoring and feedback from projects in a first implementation phase.

The monitoring of the recommendations for an institutional setting for RAC is in line with the previous recommendations. Initial steps have been taken in a number of areas, but an institutional backdrop for the recognition of acquired competences is still nowhere to be seen here in Flanders.

RAC procedure

- a recognition procedure is a difficult but necessary component of meaningful career guidance for the individual;
- the portfolio is the point of departure for file creation and further coaching in the management of the recognition procedure;
- the individual is owner and manager of his or her own portfolio;
- assessment of competences is based on accepted professional standards and accepted vocational training standards;
- the choice of assessment methods is the responsibility of the accredited assessment body or agency;
- recognition is based on the assessor's report;
- recognition leads to certification with formal civil effect.

It can hardly be denied that these recommendations led to a further refinement of RAC policy. Many recommendations are by now familiar in the development process in one or other field. The most intractable problem, however, is the lack of coordination in the monitoring of the various initiatives.

At the present moment RAC policy focuses on formulating the objectives of its model, i.e., increasing personal development and the potential for individuals to access the labour market and society. The RAC model is best approached from two angles if the goals are to be attained. One: the path of formal recognition and ensuring transferable acquired competences. In other words, the civil effect of the recognition of competences. The second angle is the support and guidance of individuals in the

development of competences. This means, *in concreto*, development of a full spectrum of (life) career guidance, open to all citizens. (Administratie Werkgelegenheid, 2002)

1.6.2. The Pact van Vilvoorde

The Pact of Vilvoorde was signed on 22 November 2001. The Pact embraces 21 strategic objectives endorsed by the Flemish Government, the social partners, Flemish environmental organisations and those wishing to see these parties represented in 2010. A number of these objectives are important for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The first two objectives can be set in this context without too much difficulty.

Objective 1: "By 2010 Flanders will have further evolved into a learning society. Lifelong and lifewide learning are embedded in society. But at least 10% of the inhabitants of Flanders aged between 25 and 64 are involved in permanent education or training. Yet a learning society also accepts that competences, wherever and however they may happen to have been picked up along the way, should be recognised in their equivalence" (Pact van Viilvoorde, 2004a).

The objective aims to elicit three effects:

- being able to anticipate new challenges more flexibly (flexibility)
- increasing the employability of higher-skilled and others (employability)
- personal development being central to the learning potential of the individual.

On 30 September 2005, the objective of the Pact of Vilvoorde was adjusted. For the first objective the target of 10% Flanders inhabitants between 25 and 64 years of age participating in training was increased to 12.5%. The emphasis was also placed on participation of the low-skilled. (VESOC, 2005)

Objective 2: "In 2010 the number of functionally literate and the number of people with ICT competences will have risen to more than three quarters of the population. The number of young people leaving school without sufficient starting qualifications for the labour market and society will have at least halved by that time. Education should have become more democratised by 2010.

The dualisation of society is counteracted by guaranteeing access to learning initiatives for everyone and by effectively and efficiently addressing the problem of inequality of opportunities throughout the entire learning process" (Pact van Vilvoorde, 2004a).

The objectives are intended:

- to eliminate illiteracy as regards new technologies and to prevent the digital gap from becoming bigger among risk groups
- to ensure easy passage from education to the labour market
- to remove barriers to higher forms of education
- to ensure equal opportunities in education

In the review in 2005, the emphasis is on children of parents with low educational attainment. The target participation in higher education for this group is 60%. (VESOC, 2005)

1.6.3. Other

The two documents discussed above (the action plan *Een leven lang leren in goede banen* and the *Pact of Vilvoorde*) have their origins in the previous term (1999-2004). The present Flemish Government intends to further reinforce lifelong and lifewide learning. In the Coalition Agreement 2004-2009, the policy documents of the present Flemish ministers for Education and Training, Work and Culture, Youth and Sports included several commitments in the field of lifelong and lifewide learning.

We go into more detail in the next two chapters. However, to round off the historical context we must also refer to the European Union policy documents that serve as important sources of inspiration for non-formal and informal learning in Flanders, because they form the general framework of Flemish policy. We refer here to the Luxembourg Process (1997), the Lisbon Process (2000), the conclusions of the European Council concerning common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (approved by the ministers for education on 18 May 2004), Education and Training 2010, the Bologna⁵ and Copenhagen Process⁶, the resolution concerning the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning in the youth sector in Europe, and the programme 'Youth in action 2007-2013'.

SUMMARY:

The demographic and labour market-oriented developments in Flanders are favourable for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. They create a need for competences (such as ICT), the acquisition of which by the individual cannot always show using official recognition. With the recognition of non-formal and informal learning paths we open the way towards recognition of acquired competences. And with the recognition of acquired competences we not only cater to the needs of the labour market, but the individual also gains more freedom and opportunities for development in various fields, such as employment, education or the personal sphere. These objectives have meant that the development process for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and, more particularly, of recognition of acquired competences has been taken up by the government since 1999-2000. With research, steering and working groups, pilot projects, legislation and yet more pilot projects, numerous initiatives have been undertaken across the Flemish landscape. These have been around the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the mapping out and recognition of acquired competences, the building up of portfolios and so forth.

⁵ Bologna Process: Developments in Europe directed towards harmonisation in higher education.

⁶ Copenhagen Process: Developments in Europe directed towards greater alignment of professional education and vocational training.

Chapter 2: A description of institutional arrangements

As indicated, we begin this chapter with a description of the institutional arrangements that apply or have entered into effect during the present legislation (2004-2009). As mentioned before (see the introduction), non-formal and informal learning is not strictly bound to any one specific policy area. In general, we may say that three policy areas, namely *Work and Social Economy*, *Education and Training* and *Culture, Youth, Sports and Media* are critical to non-formal and informal learning. The description of the institutional arrangements will therefore also require these policy areas to be split up. We discuss below the relevant elements for non-formal and informal learning in terms of the policy framework and legislation. Since the coordination of tasks at the work-education interface is in the hands of the Education and Training policy domain, it is discussed first, followed by Work and Social Economy and, finally, Culture, Youth and Sports.

2.1. The political and legal framework

2.1.1. Existing regulation concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning - EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Policy document 2004 - 2009: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The policy document for educational and vocational training starts with the observation that Flemish people are well educated. However, the growing cultural diversity, the complexity of the knowledge society and the rapid pace of social change places great pressure on individuals and also provides a climate characterised by a lack of their certainty. A individual's quality of life depends on the extent to which he or she manages to tailor his or her competences.

The knowledge economy increases the social importance of education and training. Research also shows that the dualisation of society has already become more marked. Social background and ethnicity remain strongly linked to educational opportunities.

Bearing this situation in mind, a number of strategic policy lines have been taken.

1. Developing talents into competences.
2. Converting competences into transparent qualifications.
3. Guaranteeing a lifelong basic right to quality education and training.
4. Equal opportunities as a point of departure.
5. Guaranteeing safe, modern learning environments.
6. Supporting teaching staff in their professionalisation.
7. Promoting effective, purposeful management in education and training.

In adult and higher education, regulations have been devised for the recognition of acquired competences (RAC). The regulations for higher education are currently undergoing evaluation. The Adult Education Centres (Centra voor Volwassenonderwijs - CVO) and the Basic Education Centres (Centra voor Basiseducatie - BEC) will make

agreements with other providers of education in the region, so that learners will have an easier transition between those providers. They will also make regional arrangements for RAC and ways of combining work and learning. This should allow learners to join courses and move between institutions more easily. This will be followed by an investigation into whether this approach is also necessary for compulsory education. Competences required for occupations would be recognised in a new low-threshold RAC service that would be set up in Flanders.

What is crucial here is the construction of a quality assurance system for RAC. The way in which the evaluation and validation of competences will be undertaken is the key question. It is equally important to decide which organisations can undertake the quality assurance task and the accreditation of those organisations.

The policy document emphasises the link between education and the labour market. One of the most significant areas of concern here is the certificate of experience (see below and chapter 3), which may also be awarded by adult education institutions. Another area of concern is the development of a Flemish qualification structure (see Chapter 3).

To underline the link between the Education and Vocational Training and Work and Social Economy policy areas, many of the measures proposed in the policy documents run in parallel. In terms of Culture, Youth and Sports and, more specifically, training courses in socio-cultural work, reference is made to the 'Broad School' (Brede School) experimental projects.

Decree relating to the 'flexibilisation' of higher education in Flanders (30 April 2004)

On 30 April 2004, the Flemish Government passed the '**Flexibilisation Decree**'. This decree is a further step towards the reform of higher education as agreed in the Declaration of Bologna (1999). Besides working on a transparent and comparable higher education system and the introduction of an education system consisting of three cycles, the bachelor, the master and the doctor, the Bologna Declaration also proposes "the introduction of a credit system, comparable with the ECTS system" as a third objective. This objective, with the rider that "credits may also be acquired outside the context of formal higher education (such as lifelong learning)", has given rise to this new decree in Flanders.

The decree relating to the flexibilisation of higher education in Flanders has brought in a new system for learning in Flanders. The initial premise is that a student can participate in higher education and acquire competences at a suitable tempo. Flexibilisation of higher education signifies a shift from a year-based system to a credit-based system. Learning progression is no longer determined on the basis of passing all examinations each year, but by the acquisition of proofs of credit for the separate course components. The student receives a credit certificate for each course component for which he/she has shown, in an evaluation (examination), that the relevant (partial) competences have been acquired to a sufficient extent. The sum of all the required credits leads to a degree. The continuation of studies may be simplified and/or accelerated by recognition of qualifications acquired earlier (QAE) and competences acquired earlier (CAE). The

right qualifications or competences may lead to (partial) dispensations. The result is an individualised study course.

This decree points to the associations as validating bodies for proofs of qualifications and competences acquired earlier. The successful completion of a proficiency test leads to a certification of proficiency, which may lead to a shortening of the study duration (dispensation) or direct to the acquisition of a degree. The certificate is also awarded by the associations.

Decree for the regulation of various matters pertaining to adult education (2 March 1999 and 15 June 2007)

For adult education, provision has already been made for the recognition of acquired competences (via non-formal and informal learning) in the decree of 2 March 1999 for the regulation of various matters pertaining to adult education. Such recognition is within the authority of the centres (= dispensation policy as a function of the shortening of the study duration).

On 15 June 2007, the Flemish Parliament approved the Flemish decree relating to (formal) adult education⁷. The decree pays great attention to the validation of acquired competences, both with regard to dispensations and the certification of acquired competences.

The decree sets out a clear approach to the assessment and certification of acquired competences in adult education. Distinction is made between the following actions:

- The measuring and testing of acquired competences as a function of the dispensations applied by the centres. The student has the right to shorten a course and should therefore be released from those components of the course for which his or her competences are already sufficiently established.
- The assessment of professional competences. The decree of 21 April 2004 relating to the Title of Professional Competence or certificate of experience (see 2.1.2.2.) provides that the Adult Education Centres may act as assessment bodies. This task is included in the decree relating to adult education, subject to the centres' abiding by the provisions of the abovementioned decree and the implementing act on that decree of 23 April 2004.
- The centres authorised to teach general education programmes are permitted to function as decentralized examining boards and to award secondary education diploma's.
- The certification of competences acquired via distance learning courses. The centres could have the educational powers for organising relevant training evaluations and awarding certificates.

⁷ The reform of Adult Education started on 1 September 2007.

- The potential for developing, over the longer term, a more standardised certification of acquired competences for non-vocationally-oriented qualifications, for instance in connection with languages.

The validation of acquired competences in the context of dispensations from course components is the responsibility of the director of an educational institution. In the interests of the students and the institution, efforts must be made for uniformity between the measuring of acquired competences and the granting of dispensations. This requires closer cooperation and alignment at regional level (procedures, instruments, assessment). Via the consortium, there are regional links between Adult Education Centres ('Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs') and Basic Education Centres ('Centra voor Basiseducatie') situated in the same working area. These centres should be able to develop a joint framework of agreement for competences acquired elsewhere.

2.1.2. Existing regulations in relation to recognition of non-formal and informal learning - WORK.

Policy document 2004 - 2009: WORK

The policy document for Work, by the Minister for Work, Education and Training, pays special attention to lifelong learning. In the first instance it follows through on the objectives of the Pact van Vilvoorde and it aims for 10% participation in permanent vocational training (adjusted upwards to 12.5% in 2005) by 2010 for the Flemish population from 25 and 65 years of age.

In order to work towards this objective, the policy document 2004-2009 approaches the world of commerce and industry as an investor in education and vocational training courses. The development of talent must be given more emphasis in the context of enterprise.

Regarding informal learning, reference may be made to some important initiatives relating to **work experience**. Offering work experience has long been used as an instrument for supporting disadvantaged groups within the Flemish labour market. The Flemish Government has a number of instruments for offering job-seekers in-time work experience:

- the Work Experience Programme (WEP-plus),
- Individual Vocational Training in Enterprise (Individuele Beroepsopleiding in de Onderneming - IBO) and
- the various forms of training and apprenticeships for job-seekers (where training often alternates with practical experience).

In 2003, 3 000 (WEP-plus), 10 000 (IBO) and 15 000 (apprenticeships) new job-seekers respectively were reached on an annual basis through these programmes. Evaluation studies have gone on to show that work experience is an effective tool to support lasting integration in the labour market. Researchers observe a significant employment result for participants in work experience projects in the short term and in the long term. After two years of work experience in WEP-plus, 60% found employment. After seven years the figure is 70%. Compared with a control group that did not find employment, this constitutes an improvement of 50%. The participants in IBO showed an even better

employment result. After two years, 95% had found employment. Offering work experience has become a crucial instrument in labour market policy. Job-seekers are given a chance to reconnect with the labour market, acquire competences and considerably improve their position in the labour market.

The IBO programme targets employers in the private sector. It is designed to reach out mainly to the short-term and young unemployed. In recent years, substantial investment has been made in improving the coaching component. Fixed coaching sessions were introduced alongside technical training courses. Satisfaction with the on-the-job teaching was also measured, and the training of enterprise coaches was also introduced. Assessment of the programme in practice will show whether the policy is working.

The method used in WEP-plus differs from the IBO approach. WEP-plus is directed mainly towards job-seekers at greater distance from the labour market. The coaching for this group is more intense. Extra attention is paid to the acquisition of social competences and technical training is completely on-the-job. The numbers of available and filled places through WEP-plus must rise considerably during the present administration. However, a number of barriers will first have to be removed to achieve the anticipated increases. (Vandenbroucke, 2006b)

The policy document also devotes a lot of attention to the concept of careers guidance. This approach to helping job-seekers find employment is being further developed and promoted in cooperation with the VDAB. Obstacles such as the cost price and administrative charges are being removed.

The competence agenda is an important initiative and it starts from an ambition of "Developing a coordinated and coherent RAC policy in education and employment" on the basis of a joint vision for the development of common instruments and procedures. The **competence agenda** focuses on measures necessary to be ready for future socio-economic challenges up to 2010 (and the years that follow). To make the Flemish population more active, competences have to be promoted that can ease transitions to and within the labour market and keep more men and women in work: from school to work, from unemployment to work, from inactivity to work and between occupations and functions. Here, the government aims to optimise the transitional labour market, helping people who lose their jobs to return more rapidly to employment.

The Minister intends to ensure that competences are developed - in initial education, in the external labour market and within companies - that are important for sustainable, innovative economic growth.

In recent months, a scientific team (Sels e.a., 2006a, 2006b) has been preparing the competence agenda through eight discussion panels. A panel with people from a range of backgrounds (commerce and industry, trade unions, sectors, journalism, politics, ...) pondered the initial premises and priority objectives of the competence agenda. Trade unions, sectors, company executives and HR managers from large and small enterprises, providers of vocational training and career guidance experts then met in successive panels to discuss possible targets and ways of creating and ensuring success. The academics developed a discussion paper from the panels, drawing together the priority challenges and concrete proposals for which there is apparent support. This will provide the basis for wider discussion. The main conclusions are that support for the development of competences is possible if all involved parties put their faith in the

importance of the development of competences. The conditions for this include a degree of 'plain speaking' about exactly what competences are supposed to be; the development of a win-win situation for employers, employees and government; and, last but not least, a coordinated, integrated policy (Sels e.a., 2006b).

The most important initiative for **matching the supply of and demand for competences** is the development of the 'Title of professional competence' or the 'Certificate of experience' (see also below and chapter 3).

The certificate of experience is an official, **generally recognized** document issued by the Flemish Government. The certificate of experience provides certainty that well-defined, professional competences (mainly for bottleneck occupations) have been acquired. When new employees are being recruited, the certificate provides immediate clarity as to the competences someone has achieved. Certificates of experience can allow individuals to enhance their employability on the labour market. They therefore contribute to the attainment of a higher degree of employment and ease tensions in the labour market.

The matching of required competences with the talents of individuals also becomes a more seamless process. The certificates create greater transparency. They can lead to shorter, more efficient, and more effective placement paths. At the end of the day, the recognition of acquired competences also makes it possible to define a future training plan. The organisation of shorter training programmes is cost-saving and increases the chances of success. (Vandenbroucke, 2004)

The development of competences and talent is a deliberate and goal-oriented process that extends throughout an entire life and from which formal training cannot be absent. Training policy itself and all relevant parties must prepare for this. Given the timescale (a whole life), the opportunity cannot be missed to forge a link, wherever possible, with compulsory state education. In fact, it provides the foundation for lifelong learning. To those ends, the present administration is also engaged in the further development of a Flemish Qualification Structure.

The decree of 19 December 2003 laying down provisions for the supervision of the budget for 2004

Article 102 of the Decree of 19 December 2003 laying down provisions for the supervision of the budget for 2004 is the legal basis for the provision of careers services.

In that article, the Flemish Government makes provision in a support regulation (within the limits of available budget credits) on providing careers service for people in employment. The term "careers service" is taken to mean the provision of services on the basis of individual contacts between the working person and the careers service provider, whether or not supplemented with collective sessions. It includes the following steps:

- an initial contact at which the individual's interests and requirements regarding careers services are explored and in which there is also a possibility of obtaining concise but conclusive advice;

- a diagnosis whereby a coherent picture of competences, motivations and expectations is formed;
- the drawing up of a personal action plan with a career path, whether or not combined with training advice;
- the development and position of the individual at the end of the careers service interaction is measured against the personal action plan in a final interview.

The Flemish Government determines the more detailed rules and conditions in connection with the scope, nature and content of the provision of careers services. It also determines the criteria and procedure for the recognition and subsidy of centres for providing career services, supervision and control.

On 27 August 2004, the Flemish Government gave its final approval to the Flemish Government Act relating to the recognition and subsidy of centres for the provision of careers services.

The act outlines a number of measures designed to encourage participation in (non-) formal learning:

- With the Lever Credit (Hefboomkrediet – co-financing via ESF) the Flemish Government and the European Union aim to help the Flemish working population to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances in the labour market.
- With training vouchers for employers⁸ the government intends to stimulate the small and medium-sized enterprise in particular to invest in training for its employees. This measure has been in place since February 2002.
- The training vouchers for employees⁹ were launched in early September 2003. This measure is specifically directed towards increasing the responsibility of employees in keeping their competences up to standard and removing the financial threshold that prevents many from taking part in learning activities.

The Decree of 19 December 2003 laying down provisions for the supervision of the budget for 2004 is the legal basis for a specific Flemish incentive system (Vlaamse Aanmoedigingspremies¹⁰) making express provision for a form of Training Credit. Besides the allowance paid by the Federal government for career-breakers, employees who take a career break are able to follow a training course, receiving an additional financial incentive from the Flemish government.

The question is whether the financial approach towards learning and developing competences is effective. Research points, for instance, to the existence of extensive dead weight effects in subsidy systems such as ESF and the lever credit (Matheus & Bollens, 2001 in Sels & Maes, 2001). While the subsidy systems are called into being to counter market failure within the training market, government funding is used to organise training courses that would have been organised in any case (Sels & Maes, 2001)

⁸ See also Act of the Flemish Government of 18 July 2003.

⁹ Is now part of “BEA” (**Budget Economisch Advies**)

¹⁰ See also Act of the Flemish Government of 1 March 2002.

The decree of 30 April 2004 relating to acquisition of a title of professional competence

This decree is very important in the light of the recognition of competences acquired via non-formal and informal learning paths. The previous chapter discussed the 'certificate of experience' at some length. This decree spoke of the 'Title of Professional Competence', which was later to become the certificate of experience. It spans the legal framework around the acquisition of the certificate of experience. It is directed towards professionally-relevant competences, wherever acquired, and to validating those competences with a title of professional competence (certificate of experience) (see also chapter 1 and 3).

2.1.3. At the interface between Education and Training and Work

At the interface between Education and Training and Work: Policy documents 2004-2009

In order to stimulate lifelong learning, the **training market** and **training supply** must become **versatile**, **transparent** and **flexible** for the active population. Supply is, after all, very broad and includes: public training systems of a more labour-market-driven character (VDAB, Syntra, agricultural colleges); public training systems of a more generalised character (adult education centres, basic education centres, part-time art education, socio-cultural associations and training institutions, evening classes, specialised training institutions, training institutions for particular target groups, trade union training institutions, movements); training through sectoral training funds and joint learning committees; and other training courses, such as vocational training courses and courses run by private initiatives.

For the user, this offers a range of possibilities. Some form of education or training is available at any time throughout the individual's life. The market element, moreover, leads to a competitive, high-quality set of alternatives. But at the same time, the market also brings the risk of unhealthy competition and inefficient use of resources. For that reason, alignment and agreement is necessary between providers of education and training. This has to led to a high-quality supply of education and training at an affordable price.

In this matched supply approach, the Flemish Government helps potential users to find their way. Therefore the Government has developed a training bank and website. The website **www.wordwatjewil.be** with the completed training databank was launched in early March 2005.

The databank contains all of the 'learning activities' for Education (Adult education, Part-time Art Education, Basic Education), Vocational training (VDAB, Syntra) and Socio-Cultural Work. Talks are also underway with a view to incorporating the sectors and private training providers. A training forum is attached to the website, providing a training desk where applicants and providers of training and apprenticeships can find each other. The training forum is built with the candidate trainee and the company in mind, but it also takes account of intermediaries, such as the schools, learning secretaries, Chambers of Commerce, temporary employment agencies, etc. It is a generic system that can be extended to include new partners. The training forum

initiative shows that there are opportunities not only to align training organisations, but also to align training and education organisations. The data in both databanks will also be made available through the one-stop helpdesk function for employment and vocational training. (Vandenbroucke, 2006b)

The competence agenda 2010

Social partners are mobilising companies to raise the number of work placements to 30,000 over a five-year period for teachers, and to 75,000 per year for pupils. 101 examples of widely supported competence management in companies have been collected with a view to inspiring Flanders. Together with the scaled up approach to youth unemployment, those are some of the major developments from the competence agenda. It was approved on the 14th of May 2007 by the social partners and the Flemish Government and is now discussed and worked out by the educational partners.

The competence agenda consists of 10 priorities that aim to recognise and use the capacities of students, job-seekers and employees alike, across the boundaries of education and work.

The priorities are:

1. Developing competences in education: Careers are born in education. For that reason extra investments are made in guidance and improving pupils' study and career choices. The Pupil Guidance Centres will play an important role here, in close collaboration with the VDAB (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training), companies and sectors. By the end of 2007, an action plan will be published, which will include a joint project, called 'My career' (see chapter 1) among other things.
2. Acquiring competences through learning and working: Combining learning and working has a lot of advantages. Besides acquiring technical competences, pupils also develop social competences and a healthy work attitude. The social partners commit to mobilising companies for growth by creating 75,000 work placements per year for pupils in technical and vocational secondary education and 30,000 work placements for teachers of practical and technology education over a period of five years. For young people in part-time education, efforts are also made for a full-time commitment. Moreover, training schemes for job-seekers will make more intensive use of work placements, to facilitate employment opportunities. Work placement officers will be recruited to ensure that supply and demand are better balanced. The quality of workplace learning will be improved as well.
3. Action plan independent entrepreneurship for education: Flanders' entrepreneurial spirit is in need of a boost. That is precisely the objective of the action plan on entrepreneurial education. As early as nursery education, developing initiative should be a priority. More information, better awareness, and a dialogue and partnerships with the Flemish world of business are all part of the new approach.
4. Recognition of acquired competences in the labour market: Highlighting all available competences and experience is of paramount importance to the labour market. In this respect, the certificate for work experience will be a useful instrument. Test centres for more occupations and faster development of

- standards can help improve responsiveness to the needs of the labour market. A coherent and coordinated vision will be created to make different APEL-instruments from culture, education and work complementary (see chapter 3). The qualification structure will be the backbone of this coherent and coordinated policy.
5. Scaling up the approach to youth unemployment: The experiments in thirteen major cities prove that faster and more intensive responsiveness towards unemployed young people pays off. Although it is too early to start celebrating, on the basis of lessons learnt from the experiences in these cities and communes, a direct and intensive approach is being developed for all young school-leavers in Flanders with a secondary education diploma or less. 'Tailored approach' and 'sustainable employment' are the key phrases.
 6. A sound competence policy within companies and organisations: Companies and organisations can also benefit from developing their own competence policy. They will have the opportunity to exchange, compare and consolidate their know-how through learning networks. Dissemination of good practice means that others can learn from them. To demonstrate that a competence policy can have the support of both employers and employees, the social partners committed to gathering 101 good practice examples.
 7. An age-conscious personnel policy: The ageing of society is a fact. In the future, companies and organisations can no longer rely only on young employees. They have to find the right balance between young talent and experience. The creation of a centre 'Leeftijd en Werk' (Age and Work) aims to support companies and organisations on this issue. Moreover, extra resources are being deployed for mentoring projects, in which older employees give guidance to their younger colleagues.
 8. Competence development for the individual employee: Besides a competence policy in companies, self-development among employees is also important. Both at home and abroad, a whole range of tools exist in this field (training, careers guidance, APEL procedures ...). The idea is to evaluate these tools in order to allow competence development for each employee with as few thresholds as possible. The SERV partners will formulate new proposals based on this.
 9. Dealing with changing careers: Fewer employees now stay at the same workplace for their entire career. A career is no longer a long, straight line. Periods of work increasingly alternate with periods without work, and changes and transitions become ever more frequent. It is important that the Flemish labour market should learn how to deal with this new reality in the right way. It is regarded as obvious that the government invests in job-seekers, but in future, employees will also be able to count on a minimum level of support. Within the job centres, an information counter will be set up, which will focus specifically on this target group. At the same time, the recognised careers guidance centres will be given more elbow-room. The development of this service will take place in close coordination with the trade unions. Here also, intensive use of the virtual 'My career' file (see chapter 1) will be made. This is a need to prepare the job centres for this move, which will be tested in one province this autumn.
 10. The sectors as pivots for competence policy: The sectors are seen as the driving force in the entire renewal process that the competence agenda seeks to develop. With the support of the European Social Fund, they will therefore be

encouraged to develop into centres of expertise for competence policy within their field. This expertise will be made available to pupils, as well as job-seekers and employees and companies.

38 million Euros is earmarked for these actions. The first 10 million Euros will be spent in 2007, and an annual 14 million Euros in 2008 and 2009. Both the Flemish Government and the social partners endorse the importance of the agenda and explicitly commit themselves to each of the 10 priorities. In addition, they jointly invite the education sector for a constructive discussion about the competence agenda, in order to arrive at a firm mutual commitment with them as well. The actions will be evaluated within VESOC (Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee).

2.1.4. Existing regulation in connection with recognition of non-formal and informal learning - CULTURE - YOUTH - SPORTS.

Policy documents 2004 - 2009: CULTURE - YOUTH - SPORTS

In terms of Culture, Youth and Sports, a distinction must be made between the recognition (i.e., validation) of competences acquired within the non-formal and informal context and the recognition (i.e., appreciation) of non-formal and informal education 'an sich'. Both issues are relevant to lifelong and lifewide learning and are, to a large extent connected, as will soon become apparent.

The policy declarations (policy document 2004-2009 and the most recent policy letters) express the intention to develop a recognisable interpretation of the RAC concept for Culture, Youth and Sports, in cooperation with the relevant sectors. This refers to the specificity of the competences acquired via non-formal and informal learning in these sectors, including competences, attitudes and knowledge that are of importance for functioning in a lifewide context. In lifewide learning, attention is paid not only to personal development, but also to social integration, social cohesion and active citizenship. The points of departure here are therefore not utilitarian (labour-market-driven) perspectives and considerations.

A **RAC concept** will contribute significantly to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In the policy document and letters, reference is made to the broad socio-cultural work for young people and adults as being the core of non-formal and informal learning. This recognition supports the sector considerably in positioning various cross-sector links of cooperation, not least DIVA¹¹. It is in this context that there

¹¹ The General Meeting of DIVA vzw is made up of representatives from: VDAB, VIZO, SoCiuS, GO, VSKO, OVSG, POV and CBE, supplemented by external experts. The Board of Directors is made up of representatives from: VDAB, VIZO, SoCiuS, GO, VSKO, OVSG, POV, CBE. The education networks now form part of the Dienst Informatie en Afstemming (DIVA vzw). The Federatie basiseducatie, VDAB, VIZO and SoCiuS likewise form part of DIVA. The objective is to pool the resources of all publicly financed providers of vocational training and thereby promote participation in lifelong learning. The new DIVA will develop projects that lead to greater clarity in vocational training supply, a better inflow of students and greater cost-effectiveness. One of the existing DIVA projects is the Wordwatjewil (Become What You Want) databank that bundles all vocational training of the different partners, supplemented with the higher education supply.

was felt to be a need for an individual, sector-specific RAC story. A working group was formed in 2005, led by SoCiuS and FOV (see chapter 4), with the task of developing a vision around RAC in socio-cultural work. At the request of the Anciaux cabinet, a range of stakeholders were consulted to ensure the development of a vision for RAC borne by the whole socio-cultural sector. Contact was made with the Flemish Sports Federation (VSF-Vlaamse Sportfederatie), the Flemish Federation for Volunteers (VSV-Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk), the Flemish Federation for Folk Culture (VCV-Vlaams Centrum voor Volkscultuur), the Flemish Federation for Amateur Art (VCA-Vlaams Centrum voor Amateurkunsten), Youth Work (Steunpunt Jeugd), the Federation for Libraries (VCOB-Vlaams Centrum voor Openbare Bibliotheken) and Cultuur Lokaal. This vision text was published in late 2005. (see Chapter 4)

In addition, there is also the concept of '**brede school**'¹² (Broad school) approaches to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, as indicated in the policy documents for Culture and Youth. In non-formal and informal education, those involved in youth work and the socio-cultural sector have built up a reputation outside formal education. Their expertise in teaching competences, attitudes and knowledge is appreciated. A 'broad school' brings together actors working in compulsory learning and in free time. The concept of the broad school offers the potential for a harmonised, free-time supply.

A further opportunity, with a view to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in socio-cultural work, may be found in the development of the **learning booklet** (leerboekje) (see below and Chapter 3) as a first achievement of RAC.

In addition to these opportunities, the Culture and Youth policy documents also refer to the **dangers** that are inherent in the recognition of (competences acquired through) non-formal and informal learning. Particular attention has to be paid to a, perhaps undesirable, formalisation of socio-cultural work and the need to create clarity in terms of certification. It is important that the development and mapping out of a RAC policy closely involves and takes a steer from the culture, youth and Sports policy areas (Anciaux, 2004a).

Decree of 4 April 2003 relating to socio-cultural adult education

In concrete terms, the aim of **restructuring** was to give socio-cultural adult education a position in the context of lifelong and lifewide learning and, thus, to **revalue** and **legitimise** this field of training. To achieve this, two new organisational forms were developed: the movements and the "folk high schools" (volkshogescholen). Besides the recognition of 13 regional folk high schools, three types of national training institution were funded: thematically specialised training institutions, trade union training

¹² *The 'broad school' was seen as a conceptual framework to map the network of various actors at local level. One characteristic common to all the actors is a concern for the general development and realisation of the child as well as the explicitly local character (local authority, district-specific). The network may consist of schools, initiatives for out-of-school child care, libraries, neighbourhood actions, socio-cultural initiatives, youth work initiatives, sport clubs, youth music workshops and art-time art education, centres for local student tuition and numerous youth care facilities, etc.*

institutions and training institutions for specific target groups (people with a disability and prisoners). Tracking the developments of the folk high schools is seen as an important area for attention within the framework of a cross-sector link of cooperation such as DIVA, because they are regional actors with a pluralistic character and with special regional missions in the field of coordination and harmonisation.

In the decree relating to socio-cultural adult education, Point 2 Article 2 outlines the background for non-formal and informal learning through a description of the methods used:

The policy document Culture refers to the reorganisation that took place within socio-cultural adult education under the previous administration and its reflection in the Decree:

“2° socio-cultural method: a manner of thinking and acting supported by reflection, knowledge through experience and scientific perception; the method is used by socio-cultural associations, institutions and movements and their voluntary and professional workers to address and activate individuals and groups in one or more dimensions of existence and in their various life situations; these dimensions of existence typify the person as “meaning and value seeker”, “processor of knowledge”, “capable actors or creative explorers”, as “culture-shaper and social being”; all the objectives allow the development of an “own identity”, the promotion of social integration and social participation and the build of a democratic, sustainable, inclusive society; to that end opportunities are created in a conscious, well-considered manner that are conducive to meeting and informal learning; processes for critical awareness, reflective responsibility and personal qualification are stimulated; thought is given to the development of social, cultural and communicative competences and the creation of social networks and cultural symbols; in the creation and use of these opportunities the people and groups involved are active participants with whom the workers engage in dialogue regarding the specific goals and approach.”

There is no assessment at the end of a learning course in socio-cultural adult education, and there is therefore also no “certification” in the form of a degree etc. Efforts are now being made by SoCiuS to promote the award of ‘learning certificates’ (cf. infra) as proof of completion on education/training with an eye to a wider social recognition and appreciation of the learning processes in socio-cultural adult education.

Sectors such as Arts and Heritage, which are also familiar with non-formal and informal education, also have their say in the debate around the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in general and the recognition of acquired competences in particular. At the present moment, however, no regulation is yet in force for these sectors. The step up to the recognition of competences in these fields may be the introduction of a system of quality assurance. For the Arts and Heritage sector, the creation and introduction of a quality assurance system may be an objective in a decree to determine, plan, improve and control systematically the operation and provision of services to the organisation. This objective induces many organisations to think about the competences that are acquired through their activities.

Decree relating to Flemish Youth Policy 2002

The decree relating to Flemish Youth Policy ('Vlaams Jeugdbeleid') is the legal framework for the recognition of youth organisations who work on a national scale. As a part of their tasks, they also take on **the training of youth leaders**. In order to become (or to remain) accredited, this modular guidance or management training must meet a **number of conditions**, listed in a regulation by the Youth Department of the Agency for Socio-cultural Work for Youth and Adults (Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media). All training activities intended to be taken into consideration for a certification from the Flemish Community should be qualitatively grounded and therefore must satisfy a bundle of criteria. If the activities meet these criteria, the Youth Department issues a certification for the participant having completed the approved programme and the associated probationary period. There are 4 certifications in youth work: animator, chief-animator, instructor and chief-instructor.

Decree for the reform of the Flemish public institution for Sports ('Commissariaat-generaal voor de Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en de Openluchtrecreatie' in 'BLOSO'.)

The Flemish sports administration Bloso has legislative responsibility of "organising the training of staff via the establishment of training programmes and the organisation of training courses for sport-technical and executive staff". The Flemish Trainers School (VTS-Vlaamse Trainersschool)¹³ was created to carry out that mission.

The Flemish Trainers School focuses on the many volunteers who are active in the sports clubs. The training courses organised by the VTS offer opportunities for further training to qualify as Initiator/Youth Sports Coach or Trainer in various sports. The VTS recognizes acquired competences and qualifications. To this end, it works with **assimilation or equalisation** with one of the existing VTS training courses (on the basis of a constantly updated assimilation table) and **dispensations**. (see Chapter 3)

2.2. Governance and the role of government

2.2.1. Creation of a matrix of all actors involved in the governance of formal, non-formal and informal learning

The main powers for formal, non-formal and informal learning and vocational training are vested in the **Communities**. Where the recognition of competences impinges on employment policy, there is a shared responsibility with the Federal Government. A study conducted by the Association Antwerp (Roels, 2002) offers a map of the

¹³ On 1 January 1994 the Vlaamse Trainersschool (VTS) was created as cooperation link between Bloso, the Flemish universities with physical development courses (VUB, RUG, KU-Leuven) and the Vlaamse Sportfederatie (VSF) as representative of all sports federations accredited by the Flemish Government. The signing of the cooperation protocol by the various partners brought the Flemish Trainers School official recognition as executive organ for the decretal mission of BLOSO in the provision of training for sports staff.

competences and the institutional development framework for a RAC procedure ((life) careers guidance and certification of competences).

The study (Roels, 2002) concludes that the following lies within the responsibility of the communities: defining the entitlements for people; outlining the rules for following a RAC procedure; and standards for bodies and agencies charged with the task. The communities also have the power to decide which steps a RAC procedure should contain and what the result should be, the minimum conditions for the recognition of the institution undertaking RAC procedures, financing for the procedure, and the required knowledge and training of people charged with the supervision and certification procedure and the protection of privacy.

The **federal legislator** intervenes if the RAC affects the relation between employee and employer in terms of employment law. Federal government must decide, for instance, which categories of employees have the right, *during working hours*, to follow a RAC procedure and the frequency with which this may occur. Protection from dismissal and the question whether an employer may or may not demand the result of a procedure must also be settled by a (federal) law and/or (interprofessional) CLA. The Federal Government also determines on access to regulated occupations and the conditions necessary to that end (Roels, 2002). The occupations and degrees are listed in a Federal Government degree file.

The above employment-law provisions concern the individual employee. In the context of RAC, attention may also be directed towards the collective interests of employees and employers through developing a competences-oriented training policy. For example, the setting up of a training plan that takes account of the vocational training courses for employees required within the enterprise. A federal law may in that case oblige the enterprise to draw up these plans and to make provision for advisory powers for the Works Council and for the Committee for Prevention and Protection (Comité voor Preventie en Bescherming op het werk). These facets do, after all, touch upon federal responsibility for collective employment law.

The Flemish legislator then regulates the *content and the form* of these plans. The Flemish social partners may develop a regulation in a Flemish CLA.

The **certification** of competences can take place in various ways. It is usually a matter for education, whereby the certification of competences in general means either that an education programme is successfully completed, or that dispensations may be granted within an education or vocational training programme. However, it is also among the powers of the Community to award a new, autonomous, certificate if necessary to prove that an individual possesses certain competences. Regarding higher education, the Flemish Government has transferred powers to the Associations for Higher Education (Associaties Hoger Onderwijs). Students may obtain a certificate of proficiency ('bekwaamheidsbewijs') for competences acquired outside the formal education system.

Certificates are also issued and certified by the Flemish Government in Culture, Youth and Sports. The Flemish Government issues certificates within youth work (animator, chief animator, instructor and chief instructor), although it does not do so for socio-cultural adult education, which is specifically subsidised to offer training in a non-formal context and which is free to award or not award 'certificates of learning'.

In the Sports sector (e.g., the VTS and Sports federations) BLOSO issues certificates for specific training courses recognised by the Flemish Community.

2.2.2. Which roles does the government assume? Does an inter-ministerial approach exist?

At first, the government plays a coordinating, structuring and integrating role. In that spirit the Flemish Government approved a new tripartite structure for lifelong learning on 25 February 2005.

In keeping with the policy intentions of ministers Vandenbroucke and Anciaux to further develop the recognition of non-formal and informal learning across the various policy areas and in consultation with all involved partners, the **stipulation of policy** is effected by the Committee Education, Training and Work ('Ministerieel Comité Onderwijs, Vorming en Werk'). This is chaired by the Minister for Work, Education and Training and the Minister for Culture.

Policy support is forthcoming through an interdepartmental structure created in pursuit of 'Better Administrative Policy (BBB-Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid). The departments of Education and Training, Work and Social Economy and Culture, Youth and Sports are involved.

To facilitate integrated policy support, work proceeds on an integrated structure that is designed to simplify and reinforce cooperation between the various policy areas. The Project Strategic Education and Training Policy (Project Strategisch Onderwijs- en Vormingsbeleid) was set up for this purpose within the department of Education and Training. It is, however, broader-based as regards content, being situated at the interface of the competences for Education, Work and Culture. It is directed towards:

- **The stimulation of lifelong and lifewide learning.** This starts in compulsory education, spans learning throughout the career and includes all forms of learning of a non-formal, informal or formal character, whether generalist or of a more vocational bent.
- **The reinforcement of the connection between education and the labour market.** This includes all matters that fall within the different areas, such as: harmonising the changing demand for competences in the world of commerce and industry with education, the supply of education and vocational training courses, the potential for good-quality on-the-job training and the increasing links between learning and working, the validation of competences, the promotion of vocational learning and equivalent supply-side alignment of education and vocational training courses with an eye to greater efficiency and effectiveness and improved labour market mobility.

The general objective of the integrated policy is the development of an integrated approach to maximising human capital, to deploy those competences and use them

effectively. It is, among other things, crucial that policy instruments are aligned as far as possible without losing the individuality of the concerned policy areas in the process.

Policy is implemented by vzw DIVA (founded 31 March 2003) for adult education, and by the Regional Technological Centres (RTC) for local harmonisation between education and the labour market.

However, the government is also the driving force behind the development of a vision and a long-term perspective for lifelong learning and for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

2.3. Resources

2.3.1. – 2.3.2. Financing of non-formal and informal learning and costs in connection with assessment

Costs are connected with a RAC procedure. To map the current cost and financing of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the distinction between Education and Training, Work and Culture must be maintained. Different procedures apply for these three policy areas, as do different sources of funding. The distinction must then always be borne in mind between the financing of non-formal and informal education on the one hand and the financing of recognition of competences acquired in a non-formal or informal context on the other hand. In certain cases, however - for instance in Youth Work - the two are interconnected.

2.3.1.1. EDUCATION

The procedure for recognition of acquired competences or qualifications in higher education does not involve any costs, unless it relates to certificates for which the institution does not know the 'value' and considers it necessary to order an additional proficiency test. This is the case for competences acquired outside formal education, that is, through non-formal or informal learning. In that case, the associations¹⁴ are responsible for recognition and assessment and also for the cost price of the proficiency test. The maximum cost for the assessment varies (VLOR, 2007):

- 590 euro for a proficiency assessment at academic or professional bachelor level
- 770 euro for a proficiency assessment at master level if the individual has no bachelor degree
- 230 euro for a proficiency assessment at master level if the individual has a bachelor degree
- 55 euro administrative cost for a proficiency assessment for partial elements of a study + cost depending on the number of competence assessments to be undertaken

¹⁴ An association in Flemish higher educations is a link of cooperation between one university and one or more university colleges.

The procedure for recognition of acquired competences or qualifications in adult education does not involve any costs. There are two exceptions to that rule.

- 15 euro for students who have enrolled in a distance course and want their competences assessed
- 15 euro for students who take up the procedure of assessment through the decentralized examination boards in order to obtain a secondary education diploma (cf. 2.1.1).

2.3.1.2. WORK

The costs of non-formal and informal learning on the labour market include the payment of the wages of the employee during his or her absence and the costs of the procedure itself. Naturally only these costs are defrayed by the job-seeker.

For the job-seeker there are, in theory, 3 actors that might be approached for funding, i.e., the government, the employee or the employer. Sectoral vocational training funds may also be engaged or paid educational leave.

However, sectoral vocational training funds are managed by the social partners within the federal structure of the social dialogue. Paying the wages of the absent employee links with the paid educational leave system. This matter is currently regulated by the (federal) recovery law of 22 January 1985, as well as by numerous implementing orders. The government, the employer, or the sectoral vocational training fund may in principle bear the costs, except for the payment of the wage, such as operating, administrative and personnel costs. The sectors manage the sectoral vocational training courses whereby a regulation in the matter will be developed via a CLA within the federal framework. An interprofessional CLA may be declared generally binding by a Royal Decree (Roels, 2002).

For the recognition of competences according to a certificate of experience, the European Social Funds, together with Flanders, makes the necessary financial resources available to the test centres (Hefboomkrediet).

The individual must only pay the practical test plus a small fee. Many people are also entitled to a reduced rate or even exemption from payment. The cost of transport to and from the test centre is completely refunded. A declaration on 'word-of-honour' or a driving licence will suffice for this. The exploratory interview is free of charge for every applicant. The contribution to the practical test is adjusted according to the situation of the applicant:

- Unemployed people registered at VDAB and people in part-time compulsory education: free of charge
- Self-employed people belonging to a disadvantaged group¹⁵: 25 euros

¹⁵ Disadvantaged groups are people with low academic attainment (not higher than secondary education degree), the over-45s, people with disabilities and immigrants.

- Employees belonging to a disadvantaged group and the self-employed: 50 euros
- Employees not belonging to a disadvantaged group: 100 euros

“Training vouchers”(see chapter 1) may also be demanded for the test. In practice, all test centres are currently providing the service free of charge.

2.3.1.3. CULTURE, YOUTH and SPORTS

In terms of socio-cultural work for youth and adults, organisations may be recognised and receive a government subsidy for their activities. This includes training in a non-formal context.

Regarding **socio-cultural adult education**, the organisations may or may not issue a certificate to their members for a completed course of training. These learning certificates (see above and Chapter 3) may be downloaded free of charge from the SoCiuS website by anyone organising a course of training.

Regarding **youth work**, the costs of staff training in youth work in the period before the Flemish Youth Policy Decree (Vlaams Jeugdbeleid) of 2002 could be subsidised. The Flemish Youth Policy Decree introduced funding with no strings attached. This replaced a direct connection between staff training and subsidy. With this financing, the vocational training establishments are responsible for the setting up of vocational training courses. The certification is effected by the Youth Department (Afdeling Jeugd) of the Flemish Government or the Agency for socio-cultural adult and youth work (‘Intern verzelfstandigd agentschap (IVA) Sociaal-Cultureel werk voor Jeugd en Volwassenen’). The cost for the certification is part of the main funding for the training. The individual therefore does not pay for it. However, most training courses require payment of a registration fee from either the individual or the local authority.

Legislative responsibility for the recognition and assessment of competences in the **Sports sector** lies with BLOSO. BLOSO provisionally finances the assessment of incoming applications itself. In an interview with a BLOSO officer, there was an unwillingness to assess ‘mass’ applications concerning RAC on account of insufficient resources. The Flemish Trainers School is preparing a dossier on the subject in the framework of RAC. Applications for assimilations and dispensations don’t cost anything for the applicant. Costs for processing the files are subsidised, but this does not take into account the number of files. At present, the processing of files is part of the normal activities of BLOSO. The cost price for processing a file is not included in the calculations.

2.3.3. Number and location of assessment bodies

The assessment bodies for the policy areas Culture, Youth and Sports are discussed earlier. For an assessment of competences to obtain an experience certificate, the

individual has to visit a test centre. Depending on the occupation and skill area, the applicant must go to:

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification , bus driver & coach driver

Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB)
Keizerslaan 11
1000 Brussels
Dienst loopbaanbegeleiding

Competentiecentrum VDAB
Schoenstraat 26
9140 Temse

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification , out-of-school child care worker

vzw KIKO – SPK vzw
Campus Blairon 714
2300 Turnhout

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification , industrial painter

Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid (FVB)
Koningsstraat 45
1000 Brussels

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, tower crane operator

Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid (FVB)
Koningsstraat 45
1000 Brussels
Dienst MECA (mechanical occupations)

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, call centre operator

ATEL vzw
Duinstraat 102
2060 Antwerp

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, hairdresser & hair stylist parlour manager

UBK/UCB vzw
cel Ervaringsbewijs
Zuidstationstraat 3 box 206
9000 Ghent

SYNTRA Limburg
Herkenrodestraat 20
3600 Genk

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, removals packer & removals carrier

OCMW Gent
Opleidings- en tewerkstellingscentrum (OTC)
August Van Bockxstaelestraat 31
9050 Ledeborg

Belgische Kamer der Verhuizers (BKV)
Picardstraat 69, bus 4
1080 Brussel

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, cold-storage engineer

Vormelek
Heizel Esplanade BDC35
1020 Brussel

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, stiching

VDAB - IVOC
Leliegarde 22
1731 Zellik

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, scaffold builder

Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid (FVB)
Koningsstraat 45
1000 Brussel

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, weaver (flat)

VDAB - COBOT
Poortakkerstraat 92
9051 Gent (Sint-Denijs-Westrem)

Accredited Test Centre for Experience Certification, mobile crane operator

Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid (FVB)
Koningsstraat 45
1000 Brussel

In education, the Associations are responsible for the assessment of higher education. Under the proposed decree for adult education (2007), responsibility for assessment and

certification rests with the centres. The central examining board plays a key part in education depending on the competences in question (see Chapter 3).

SUMMARY:

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the recognition of competences can clearly be seen in the policy documents for the relevant policy areas. We may therefore state that the Flemish Government has developed a positive vision for stimulating the recognition of competences in various ways. That vision is, in part, already enshrined in decrees, but some important initiatives have been put forward at that level during the present legislation. Government is therefore also an important actor in the further development of non-formal and informal learning. Not only does it provide foundations in the form of decrees, it also plays an important part in the funding and certification of vocational training courses and non-formal and informal learning. From a policy perspective, it is important to point out that a clear start has been made towards operating structurally using a cross-departmental approach (Education and Training, Work and Culture).

Chapter 3: Description of technical arrangements

Before we consider the technical regulations for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, we must first define a number of important concepts. In line with the description of the institutional arrangements, we shall again make the distinction between the Educational and Vocational Training, Work and Social Economy and Culture, Youth and Sports and Media policy areas.

3.1. Qualifications, qualifications system and qualifications structure

3.1.1. Description of current terminology in Flanders, including possible connotations.

Lifelong learning

One important concept is 'lifelong learning'. Reference is usually made to the definition formulated by Baert e.a. (2000, 2004): "Lifelong and life-wide learning is the continuous process whereby people and organisations acquire the necessary knowledge, competences and attitudes to handle their professional, social and cultural tasks more confidently in a rapidly changing society and to assert themselves critically, in a meaningful manner and responsibly. Lifelong and life-wide learning is embedded in the fabric of personal and social life and connects with the experiences, questions and educational needs of people, organisations and enterprises."

Qualification(s)

A qualification is a complete set of recognized competences. A competence is the integrated knowledge, abilities and attitudes that a person can muster to deliver effective, valuable work directed towards a given function or role. Such performance is visible in concrete transactions and associations within a specific context (definition used by the Department of Education and Training).

Qualifications are a discrete body of learning results, the circumscribed output of a learning process, regardless of the time or the place in which the learning process happened. The competences that make up a qualification are equally well acquired at work, in a formal classroom education context or in the relative comfort of one's own home.

We draw a distinction between three kinds of learning processes: formal, non-formal and informal. The term 'learning processes' refers either to actual learning processes or to the experience people acquire.

Not all collections of competences may be regarded as a qualification. The term 'qualification' is taken to apply to *self-contained* wholes. That means that competences are taken together that are socially relevant and useful. The functionality of a qualification is clear. Qualifications are instrumental in the choice of a training course, in looking for gainful employment, for participation in socio-cultural activities.

Qualifications structure

A qualifications structure is a systematic ordering of qualifications on the basis of a clear description of associated competences. Qualifications are included in the qualifications structure and recognised on the basis of a specific procedure (definition used by the Department of Education and Training)

The development of the Flemish qualifications structure takes its lead from the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which developed out the Copenhagen Process¹⁶, and from the European qualifications developments for higher education associated with the Bologna Process¹⁷. The intention is therefore to harmonise, as far as possible, different qualifications developments for Flanders and the qualifications structures of the various Member States. Harmonisation between regional qualifications structures will also be sought at the Belgian level.

Qualifications system

A qualifications system covers all aspects of the actions in a country (or region) that result in the recognition of learning. The system includes the ways and means/resources necessary for developing and implementing a national or regional qualifications policy: institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment processes and the awarding of qualifications, recognition of competences, and other mechanisms that bind education and vocational training to the labour market and to society. One important aspect of a qualifications system is an explicit qualifications framework (OECD definition).

Qualifications framework

The qualifications framework fixes the number of levels within the qualifications structure and gives a per-level description (level descriptor) allowing assessment of the qualifications and competences that inhabit the respective levels. The qualifications framework also provides a measure (volume determination) of the mean learning effort connected with the qualifications at any given level (definition used by the Department of Education and Training).

Credits

Flanders has hardly any experience of a *credit system* to its name. True, there has been some experience of a *study points system* in higher education. However, the difference between credits and study points is one of the aspects that will require further reflection. We will also have to consider what precisely "incremental value" is supposed to mean when it comes to the use of credits. What are the main objectives of a system? What are you going to use credits for? What might it all mean for individuals and organisations? Finally, there are also issues in connection with credits and qualifications. Could credits give more information regarding qualifications? How might these credits be allocated to qualifications?

Many questions remain unresolved. Only modest progress has been made at European level for that matter. The European Commission recently brought out a consultation document concerning a credit accumulation and transfer system for vocational education and training courses (ECVET).

¹⁶ Copenhagen Process: Developments in Europe directed towards greater alignment of professional education and vocational training.

¹⁷ Bologna Process: Developments in Europe directed towards harmonisation in higher education.

Competence(s):

A skill is the "real individual capacity of a person to fit his or her attitudes in with real day-to-day and changing situations, both at work and in personal and social life" (Herpinck, 2004). This is also the definition favoured by the 'Title of Professional Competence' (2004), with the connotation of both life-wide and vocational competences. Skill is a broad concept, with many dimensions and levels. It encompasses the life-wide and labour-market-driven competences that may be acquired in a formal setting and via non-formal and even informal channels. RAC stands for the process of recognition of acquired competences whereby distinction is made between the identification, assessment and recognition of competences, with resultant effect under civil law.

The RAC policy concept makes a distinction between two of its functions. The first function is the *summative* function, addressing recognition and transfer of competences. The *formative* function is the second function, directed towards the development of competences and (life) careers guidance for individuals. The overriding objective of the RAC policy concept is personal development and employability of individuals in the labour market (Vanhoren, 2002)

3.1.2. The link between recognition of non-formal and informal learning with qualification, qualifications system and qualifications structure

The Flemish Qualifications Structure

The development of a Flemish qualifications structure sets its sights on some objectives deemed to be important for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. We draw a distinction here between direct and indirect goals. The direct goals mostly focus on the transparency and clarity that a qualifications structure can offer in its capacity as an umbrella for recognised qualifications.

A green paper listing accepted definitions and procedures is used as a framework for a Flemish qualifications structure (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2006c).

The qualifications structure should deliver some transparency into the the diversity of qualifications. No account is taken of the learning path that resulted in a particular qualification. In the end, a qualification is no more nor less than a recognised self-contained set of competences. The focus on new competences also makes it easier to incorporate other qualifications - and the assessment of these qualifications.

The first levels of the qualification structure are important for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Giving special attention to the bottom rungs of the qualification structure, that same hierarchy may even make its contribution towards *social inclusion*. That is why it is important that the qualification structure should adequately map out the qualification structure from the bottom upwards.

The timeline for the implementation and legislative grounding of the Flemish qualification structure is January 2009. The Flemish Government will then begin the design and recognition of qualifications. The preparation of the decision-making process

for the legislative implementation of the qualification structure will start once the results of the discussion and advisory procedure are processed by VLOR and SERV.

To test the usefulness of the qualifications framework for the development and scaling of qualifications, a number of test projects were started in the first half of 2007. In these, a number of qualifications are described and scaled in the Flemish Qualifications Structure. Qualifications acquired via training in a non-formal context also fall within the scope of these test projects. The creation of a Flemish qualifications structure also provides the opportunity to map the competences acquired through training to, e.g., 'animator in Youth Work'. On this basis, a clear picture of the skills gaps in training emerges and training can be improved. When competences are scaled as wholes they are then assigned a place in a broad field of qualifications and the individual can decide which learning path he or she will follow or which RAC procedures may be initiated. In other words, it will be clear for the individual which qualification(s) and/or competences are necessary to start a new qualification.

3.1.3. The civil effect attached to qualifications

The civil effect of qualifications is defined in the discussion note for the Flemish Qualifications Structure (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2006c) as the **access to additional or supplementary forms of learning, education and training or to an occupation.**

At present, the civil effect attached to certificates awarded for non-formal and informal learning is mainly restricted to **social recognition**. The scope of the civil effect depends on the training course and the context. Vocational training courses run by private initiatives, for example, mainly receive recognition in commerce and industry or in the sector. We may also refer to the broad social recognition of training in the youth sector. Many employers appreciate the engagement in youth work and, in some cases, even take their cue from the possession or non-possession of an certification from youth work.

To protect the civil effect there is a need for a legal foundation and officially authorised bodies that conduct an **assessment** and issue **accredited certificates** (Bal, 2003). The first approaches to *labour-market-oriented* competences can be seen in the delivery of certificates of experience. In socio-cultural adult education, apart from some isolated cases such as Red Cross helper or nature guide, no "qualifications" are currently acquired. It is earlier competences, and, more specifically, *key competences* that people acquire through this kind of training. It remains to be seen whether and, if so, under what conditions these (sets of) competences might/should be included in the Flemish qualifications structure. As far as awarded certificates are concerned, the so-called "learning certificates" for taking a training course in socio-cultural adult education, the sector holds on to the initial premise that certificates conferred by recognised providers of training courses (and thus also the training courses to which they attest) will generate a greater civil effect than learning certificates conferred by non-recognised providers of training courses (outside the qualifications structure). In order to become recognised for the purposes of the decree relating to socio-cultural adult education, an organisation

must work according to the principles of integral quality assurance, which should also offer a guarantee for the quality of the training course itself.

3.2. Credit accumulation and transfer:

3.2.1. Existing credit arrangements for non-formal and informal learning with underlying policy ideas, objectives and regulatory framework

In the framework of lifelong learning, it is necessary to make qualifications transferable between education and training establishments, between regions and between the countries of Europe. To offer the possibility of validating learning outcomes and transferring them independent of the time and place of learning, independent of the training establishment or the individual learning path, there is a need for a neutral value appraisal of what has been learnt. A credit system may be developed for that purpose. In such a system, a qualification would be assigned a number indicating the relative weight of the learning results of the qualification. *Credits* are thus a standardised quantitative measure of the scope of the learning that leads to the acquisition of the competences of a qualification.

In Flanders, the above description for non-formal and informal learning paths is still pure theory. Non-formal and informal learning are not linked to credits. The practice of credits has, however, been used in higher education since the introduction of the flexibilisation decree for higher education (see Chapter 2). The credits in higher education are based on an accepted international unit (ECTS) to measure the extent of a study year and the study time of a student per course component. The study load for one academic year for an average student is 60 ECTS study points. One ECTS study point corresponds to at least 25 and not more than 30 hours of prescribed education, learning and evaluation activities.

The linking of credits or other standards to non-formal and informal learning paths or, more concretely, to qualifications (and therefore to the acquired competences) is probably the next step in the process towards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. However, ECTS study points cannot be used for the allocation of credits in such learning contexts because the study points are based on the number of hours of learning activity. This applies to a lesser extent to training courses following non-formal learning paths, because study points are sometimes involved. However, it is impossible to give credits for informal learning paths on the basis of study points. In the Flemish qualifications structure, credits are therefore not linked to study points.

To facilitate the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes, work is in progress under the aegis of the European Community on a European credit system for vocational education and training (European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)). The aim is to promote mobility between the EU member states and between the various learning contexts within the member states,

thereby stimulating participation in learning activities within the framework of lifelong learning. The ECVET credit system connects with the European Qualifications Framework. It is a method for allocating credit points to qualifications or to parts of qualifications ("units"). Transfer is thus aimed at promoting the transfer and accumulation of learning results ("learning outcomes") for people crossing over from one learning context to another (European Community, 2006).

In the first half of 2007, the European Commission organised a round of consultations in the various countries that have organisations, agencies and bodies involved in the certification of qualifications.

3.2.2. Who is responsible for the arrangements regarding non-formal and informal learning? Do the arrangements differ from those regarding formal learning?

Since non-formal and informal learning do not use credits, there is little or nothing to say about the applicable arrangements. That does not detract from the fact that it is possible to predict the institutions that will bear responsibility in a later stage for the arrangements for non-formal and informal learning. Within the Work policy area and the Culture, Youth and Sports policy area, the regulation of non-formal and informal learning will take place in consultation between the Flemish Government and the respective intermediary organisations or representatives of the sector (see Chapter 4).

On the basis of the current situation, it is likely that regulation in the Education and Training policy area will follow a different approach. In higher education, in particular, responsibility for the allocation of credits and the recognition of acquired competences or qualifications rests with the associations. The associations in higher education may develop their RAC rules autonomously. To inject a modicum of uniformity into the higher education sector, the institutions in an association will have to harmonise their RAC policy in accordance with the outline conditions laid down by the association.

On the initiative of the VLOR, an inventory was drawn up in the spring of 2007 of the recognition procedures requested and applied in university colleges. This inventory provides an important insight into the nature of recognition applications in university colleges. It clarifies the extent to which these applications arise from qualifications acquired earlier in formal education or competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning paths.

3.3. Assessment methods and procedures:

3.3.1. Arrangements regarding assessment of RAC via non-formal and informal learning

The assessment methods and procedures for acquired competences via non-formal or informal learning differ according to policy area.

3.3.1.1. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

At higher education level, responsibility for assessment rests with the associations (see 2.1.1.1.). For a number of training courses (e.g., nursing), agreements have been made between the providers of the training course, via the associations, regarding the conditions and standards for “bridge students” who have **already acquired qualifications**. RAC procedures are in place for almost 20 other higher education subjects. Those who followed courses in higher adult education (HOSP) and attained a certificate, can start in higher education with a shortened study programme. The same is true for people with workplace experience. In order to make the link between centres for adult education (CVO) and higher education more flexible, universities and university colleges can work together for setting up bridging or supplementary courses (VLOR, 2007b).

Most of the universities and university colleges use APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) as a procedure for the formal recognition of learning through informal processes (see below).

Higher Education

The flexibilisation decree (see Chapter 2) opened the door to the recognition of acquired competences and the right to reduced study time. Despite the fact that Associations may decide their RAC procedures autonomously, they all follow a comparable procedure. The process for the recognition of acquired competences is intensive and subject to payment if research is needed. A procedure based on documents of proof is free of charge. In the RAC procedure, the applicant is given the chance to produce a range of evidence and/or participate in certain tests to show competence (knowledge, abilities, attitudes) without having to present proofs of study. It may be a case of work experience, training in non-recognized education establishments, hobbies or life experience. In the event of a positive assessment, a proficiency certificate is issued and the holder becomes eligible for a shortened training programme in any institution within a given Association.

The assessment procedure starts with initial assessment based on a personal portfolio of the individual. If this assessment is positive, a file is established and the proficiency assessment started. This two phase procedure limits the files and the assessments ending with a negative outcome.

Table: RAC - dossiers in higher education

	Ass. Antwerp (AUHA)		Ass. Brussels (UAB)		Ass. Ghent (AUGent)		Ass. Leuven (K.U.Leuven)		Ass. Limburg (AUHL)	
	05-06	06-07	05-06	06-07	05-06	06-07	05-06	06-07	05-06	06-07
Started files	50	-	35	-	67	71	505	384	-	-
Files with positive outcome	44	-	21	-	67	47	423	293	4	2
Files with negative outcome	0	-	2	-	0	3	73	73	-	-

Source: VLOR (2007a)

The challenge for the assessment procedure in higher education is harmonising the different methods and standards used by the associations. Presently, they depend on the associations and are distinct. This means that a student eligible for a proficiency certificate for acquired competences and for shortening of study duration will have the impression that he/she can 'shop around' between the various associations. If things do not work out at one association, why not try another association?

Other challenges are (VLOR, 2007):

- Complexity of the procedure
- Scope of the treated files
- Cost of the procedure
- The testing of the competences
 - o Range of RAC
 - o Definitions and measures for RAC
- Quality assurance
 - o Professionalisation of assessors
 - o Validation of test instruments

There are also a number of other current **initiatives** for the **recognition of education-specific competences** acquired in service or, more generally, through informal or non-formal learning. The foundation is therefore laid for entry to teacher training of individuals who have already accumulated competences and wish to cross over into education.

Teacher training

The policy letter Education and Training 2005-2006 mentioned a procedure for teacher training and, more specifically, for a professional route into teacher training. In early 2006, a first draft of the teacher training decree was approved in order to reform the training. The teacher training decree was passed by the Flemish Parliament on 6 December 2006.

Entrants into teacher training without a formal teacher qualification will be able to join a one-year training course. Candidates must apply on the basis of the proficiency certificate they receive when completing their studies.

A training course agreement is concluded between the trainee teacher, the school or schools in which he or she works and the training institution of his or her choice. The trainee teacher is paid according to the salary scale for an 'other' proficiency certificate. At the end of the training course, an assessment is conducted by a committee on which the relevant schools and the training institution are represented. If the candidate is successful - combined with the certificate for the theoretical component - it leads to the teaching diploma (policy letter Education and Training 2005-2006).

The decree includes an extra indent for teacher training in dance. Candidates who meet the general admission requirements for basic training for one cycle are eligible for an arts admission examination set up by the college organising the basic training. Candidates are also admitted to teacher training if they can show five years' relevant experience as a professional dancer in a recognised company.

3.3.1.2. WORK

On 30 April 2004, the Flemish Government ratified the decree relating to the acquisition of a title of professional competence (certificate of experience) (see Chapter 2).

In this decree, the following draft outline was drawn with regard to procedures and responsibilities:

- the individual is given the right to have his or her competences validated and to obtain a title of professional competence (certificate of experience) issued by the Flemish Government;
- the right extends to the recognition of competences acquired by formal learning and by non-formal learning, but the results or outcomes of both learning paths must relate to a specific occupation;
- the Flemish Government will determine the conditions under which students in part-time compulsory education shall have access;
- the Flemish Government will determine the conditions under which an individual shall pay a charge;
- the Flemish Government, acting on the advice of SERV, will determine the occupations for which a certificate of experience may be conferred and will determine the variants of a certificate for each occupation;
- the Flemish Government, on the basis of the occupation profiles and acting on the advice of SERV, will determine the standards;
- the installation of a procedure for identification, assessment and recognition by competent authorities. The competent authorities must satisfy quality conditions and respect a code of conduct;
- assessment will undertaken using the standards derived from the SERV occupation profiles;

- each recognised study certificate¹⁸ covering the competences required for a particular occupation or partial occupation is regarded as a title. Degrees, including those awarded for satisfying final terms developed from a particular occupation profile, are at all times taken to include at least the competences required in respect of the occupation or partial occupation concerned;
- the Flemish Government, acting on the advice of SERV and VLOR, will determine the procedure for which study certificates from education and vocational training programmes corresponding with an occupation or part of an occupation shall be identified and recognised and thus regarded as a certificate of experience;
- the installation of an Appeals Board.

SERV will be asked to provide advice annually on the selection of certificates of experience, taking account of the following criteria:

- bottleneck occupations,
- presence of an occupation profile,
- pilot experience with the assessment of acquired competences,
- balanced mix of sectors and levels of competences.

Besides selecting occupations, the advice also contains the description of and reference to a (partial) occupation profile (determination of level).

Based on that advice, the minister then determines the selection of certificates of experience.

To guarantee fair treatment of individuals and a transparent assessment, the assessment authorities must comply with nationally determined standards and assessment directives. In this way, the assessment process is objectified as far as possible and all individuals will be tested on the same criteria for obtaining a title. The standard is, so to speak, the linchpin of the procedure of identification, assessment and recognition of competences. The use of a standard will be considered where a person has suitable competences and has a sufficient level of command of those competences. A standard functions as a nationally determined, uniformly applied benchmark for assessment.

In concrete terms, a standard will be necessary for each certificate of experience, being the minimum set of the competences that are necessary to be able to pursue a well-defined professional activity (consisting of knowledge, abilities and attitudes). The standards are directly derived from the SERV occupation profiles. Occupation profiles give an accurate description of the professional activities and requirements that a person must satisfy if he or she wishes to undertake that professional activity. A standard is, in one respect, a function of an occupation profile: it merely outlines the essence - what a person must be able to do as a minimum - and reflects only what is measurable and what can be observed. A standard must be directly useful as a benchmark for

¹⁸ Being a study certificate mentioned in Article X.32 of the Decree of 14 February 2003 relating to education XIV, or in Article 85 of the Decree of 4 April 2003 relating to the restructuring of higher education in Flanders)

assessment. A standard is also broader than an occupation profile: besides competence requirements, it also includes indicators and criteria for the assessment of competences and the guidelines for assessment. Indicators and criteria focus on the level of command and the demonstrability of competences. Guidelines for assessment concern the design of assessment methods.

Given the earlier development work on occupation profiles and the direct link with employers and employees this mission was taken up by SERV.

An individual starts a procedure on a voluntary basis to obtain a certificate of experience. For the assessment of his or her competences, the individual may approach an accredited assessment authority (test centre). If necessary and always on request, this body - in a limited guidance assignment - makes arrangement for the listing of competences and the compilation of a competences passport. The assessment of the competences goes in two phases. The first phase consist an exploratory conversation with the relevant assessors. They tell the individual which competences must be obtained for the certificate of experience (guidance). In this phase there is an evaluation of the portfolio. If the result of the first phase is positive, the individual can chose to progress to the second phase. The second phase consists a practice test completed in the test centre. The test has been developed by those working in the profession and has been established in such a way as to determine if the individual has the necessary competences. The content and the duration of the test differ of course from profession to profession.

Accredited Assessment Agencies (Test Centres, see Chapter 2 (2.3.3))

The mission of the accredited assessment agencies includes:

- the creation of an assessment methodology and the development of one or more assessment tools based on nationally determined standards and directives for assessment;
- offering guidance, on request, in the listing of competences and the completion of a talents passport;
- the assessment of the applicant's acquired competences through analysis of the competences passport, a practical test and (if desired) a theoretical test;
- feedback of the applicant's assessment result and, if necessary, development of advice for further training or additional work experience;
- the development and production of advice for the conferment of a title by the recognition agency. This advice contains a report on the assessment.

Every public training provider, education establishment, private training provider, may submit an application for recognition.

Recognition agency

The mission of the recognition agency involves:

- determining the format for the certificates of experience including, as a minimum, the name of the titleholder, the logo of the Flemish Government, the accredited assessment agency and the competences covered by the standard;
- conferring and awarding the certificates of experience on the basis of the advice from the accredited assessment agency. This involves testing the advice of the accredited assessment agency against a number of conditions, such as:
 - the advice originates from an accredited assessment agency,
 - no assessment has been conducted,
 - where the standard has been used as benchmark,
 - and the set assessment guidelines have been observed,
 - the assessment outcome is positive;
- management of data, including the identification data and result of the assessment;
- the low-threshold installation and management of a databank with formats for the competences passport, titles, standards, guidelines, ...;
- the awareness raising of potential applicants to the acquisition of a title;
- awareness raising among interested parties, such as employers and education establishments and providers of training courses;
- monitoring.

The recognition agency must be a government authority. Indeed, the certificates of experience that are awarded are certificates issued by the Flemish Government.

Appeal Board

The Appeal Board has the mission of:

- processing requests from applicants for the review of an assessment,

The Appeal Board consists of a chairperson (appointed by the minister), a number of experts and a secretariat staff member. The chairperson serves a term of office of 6 years. The chairperson occupies a neutral position in relation to the assessment agencies. The secretariat may be employed in a government department. The experts are those involved in the process of developing standards and guidelines for assessment¹⁹.

Participants

The first two certificates of experience were issued in November 2006 to two call centre operators. Up to the end of July 2007, 123 individuals had been assigned for the first or second phase and 80 certificates had been delivered. 90% of the individuals were part of an at-risk group (low-skilled, older people (+50 years), people with disabilities, migrants) and 20 % were jobseekers.

¹⁹

http://www.vlaanderen.be/servlet/Satellite?cid=1105461712453&pagename=minister_frank_vandenbroucke%2FILA_Article%2FArticlePage&c=ILA_Article

Table: Guidance/Assessment - Candidates Certificate of Experience (state of affairs 01.11.2006-31.07.2007)

Assessment centre	1ste phase (guidance + portfolio) (not obliged)	Guidance and Assessment	Assessment	Total per Certificate of Experience
Auto bus-driver VDAB	6	44		50
Auto car-driver VDAB	1	6		7
Call centre operator ATEL	7	32	18	57
Crèche worker (before and after school) KIKO		22	14	36
Tower crane operator FVB	1		11	12
Industrial painter FVB			83	83
Hairdresser		1		1
Hair stylist parlour manager		2		2
TOTAL				248 persons in a certain phase of the procedure

Table: Number of awarded Certificates of Experience (state of affairs 01.11.2006-31.07.2007)

	01.11.2006 – 31.12.2006	01.01.2007 – 31.07.2007	Total
Auto bus-driver VDAB		40	40
Auto car-driver VDAB		5	5
Call centre operator ATEL	11	16	27
Crèche worker (before and after school) KIKO		17	17
Tower crane operator FVB		6	6
Industrial painter FVB		60	60
	11	144	155 Certificates of Experience*

* Due to the fact that the administrative handling of the data takes some time, no certificates of experience for hairdresser / hair stylist-parlour manager have been awarded yet.

3.3.1.3. EDUCATION and WORK: APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning)

Most universities and university colleges use APEL for their RAC procedures. APEL highlights the level of competences that individuals have already developed, makes a suitable appraisal of their potential and, in doing so, maximises employment opportunities in the labour market. Thus, APEL ensures a higher level of labour market participation and ensures that the potential talent available is increased.

APEL also maximises employability in the light of training and education, and stimulates people to continue developing their competences.

APEL is an instrument that encourages more people to develop their competences, to find a job and protect people against unemployment.

Recently, with the development of the competence agenda (see chapter 2), the APEL policy is reinforced and consolidated in the labour market and in training and education. Towards this end **four lines of action** are paramount:

1. *consolidating the certificate of experience*
using the certificate for work experience as a powerful instrument whose impact is as effective and efficient as possible;
2. *extending APEL initiatives on the labour market*
highlighting and valuing competences within the workplace, subsequent to work experience, during restructuring and outplacement, in careers guidance, etc.;
3. *maximising the effectiveness of APEL in the light of short-term education and training programmes and qualifications*
in the case of further competence development, there is a focus on making progress with competences that have already been acquired.
4. A fourth line of action transcends the lines of action 1, 2 and 3. It concerns a shared concept of a *coordinated and consistent APEL policy* in education, work and culture, leading to the **maximum number of opportunities for the recognition** of prior learning.

The APEL policy also makes a contribution to other objectives within the Competence agenda:

- lending support to learners, people at work and job-seekers in the context of their own career development by providing them with the right instruments
- ensuring a better match of competences in the labour market (see comprehensive strategy)
- promoting a competence-based and competence developing strategic policy in the corporate environment

This mainly applies to the following **actions**:

- Connecting the certificate of experience and other APEL instruments (portfolio) to all the instruments featured in the competence agenda. The APEL instruments, portfolio and certificate of experience therefore have to allow people to progress further along the competences development path.
- Coaches and assessors from the certificate of experience test centres also have to provide further advice about additional training programmes or a suitable referral to careers services.
- Developing an overall qualifications structure.

The first two lines of action involve a specific commitment of the social partners: working at the view on and promotion of the instrument “certificate of experience” and collaborating with SERV in the development of Competent in order to generate standards of assessment in a faster way.

Action lines 3 and 4 really want to make a difference towards a *coordinated and consistent APEL policy* in education, work and culture by creating a knowledge network on the recognition of acquired competences. A website concerning RAC will be developed, serving as a first line information point for citizens as well as for assessment centres because best practices in RAC, e.g. assessment tools, will be displayed on the website. Focus will also be set on developments in portfolio.

3.3.1.4. CULTURE, YOUTH and SPORTS

The vision text on RAC developed and implemented by the socio-cultural sector includes the Youth (represented by Steunpunt Jeugd) and Sports (represented by the VSF) policy areas. The term assessment means “the assessment of the listed competences that are supported by documentary evidence. Such assessment happens on the basis of (a) reference framework(s), also known as (a) standard(s). Such assessment may be done by the individual himself or herself, by means of a self-evaluation. The latter is especially the case when RAC has a formative function²⁰.

Within both socio-cultural adult education and youth work, responsibility for the ‘assessment’ of the competences may or must be conducted during a specific training course and currently lies with the training providers themselves. In this context, we also refer to the pilot project ‘WACKER’ which explores the ways in which the recognition of competences acquired in youth work can be applied in practice.

To give concrete form to RAC in socio-cultural education the strategy proposes to use two kinds of proof: the learning certificate and the competences certificate.

The **learning certificate** “is documentary evidence of experience in education and training. It is a form issued by the entity organising the activity after completion of training, a study day, course ... It is proof of participation by the person in question. The learning certificate also states the educational objectives of the training activity. To increase the recognition of such a certificate SoCiuS provides a common format used by organisations in this sector.” (SoCiuS 2006a)

²⁰ By ‘formative function’ the socio-cultural sector means the advantages (social integration, social involvement, active citizenship) and personal development of RAC. This is distinguished from the summative function, which refers to the economic and educational advantages of RAC.

A **competences certificate** shows that a coherent set of competences has been acquired. In order to obtain a competences certificate, an assessment must therefore be conducted. The awarding body guarantees that the competences are present and controls the quality of the process and the applied standards. The same format is used for a competences certificate as for the learning certificate, supplemented with a description of the competences and the level at which they were acquired (SoCiuS 2006a).

A further suggestion is the introduction of a function certificate. A **function certificate** "shows that an individual performed a specific volunteer role during a certain period. Besides the recognition of acquired competences, this certificate is therefore also a form of appraisal of the applied effort. Function certificates do not only take cover the visible, describable functions but also the less obvious. They offer extra opportunities for particular target groups. No function certificates have yet been issued. However, socio-cultural education intends to develop this instrument in the near future." (SoCiuS 2006a)

The abovementioned certificates may be included in a learning booklet (cf. supra) that may be used as a portfolio to bundle experience from non-formal and informal learning environments.

To form a picture of the **use of these certificates**, an overview of the use of the learning and competences certificates was published in October 2005, three months after the introduction of a registration system (www.prettiggeleerd.be).

It showed that a learning certificate was issued for 429 (11%) out of 3 800 registered activities. 33 of those 429 activities are organised by non-accredited organisations.

A small survey was conducted that same year among groups, institutions and associations in socio-cultural education. A total of 10 groups, 10 institutions and 9 associations were questioned about the knowledge and use of learning certificates and competences certificates.

Table: Knowledge and use of learning certificates and competences certificates

	Groups (N=10)	Institutions (N=10)	Associations (N=10)	TOTAL (N=29)
Knowledge of learning certificate	4	9	1	14
Knowledge of competences certificate	2	7	1	10
Use of learning certificate	1	6	0	7
Use of competences certificate	0	1	0	1

On the basis of this data, we can say that approximately half of the respondent organisations are aware of the learning certificate, but only a limited number of organisations actually use the learning certificate. Knowledge and use of learning certificates is highest among the institutions. The reason is that people in an institution following a training course are able to use "training vouchers" (see chapter 1). If training vouchers are used then the individual must receive a learning certificate on completion of the course. Furthermore, institutions offer more courses in non-formal contexts than groups and associations, where the learning context is more informal. One reason why the learning certificate is not more widespread is the concomitant administrative burden. The formulation of learning objectives is not clear, which also provokes resistance to issuing learning certificates.

At present, there are no strict conditions to be satisfied for issuing learning certificates. In the same survey the organisations were asked to point out the conditions they would attach to the learning certificate. The answers were varied, but they do give a picture of the vision for conditions and quality assurance for the learning certificate. The most frequently mentioned conditions related to the duration of training, the demand from the participants themselves and the availability of training vouchers (SoCiuS 2006a).

Only 1 of the respondent organisations makes use of competences certificates. The **resistance** to using competences certificates is based on a perception that attaching them to training makes learning too formal. This affects the spontaneous character in which learning should take place. Furthermore, "lifewide" training courses, for example, politics, are less amenable than "exact" subjects to the testing of competences. A final barrier relates to the academic character that the training assumes through the issue of certificates and the testing of competences. Participants with negative experiences of regular education, in particular, tend to resist this. Approximately one third of the organisations also expressly stated that they never made use of competences certificate.

The sports policy area occupies a specific position in the debate on the recognition of acquired competences. Individuals who have proven themselves in a sport may apply for a **reduction of study time** for training courses in 'Sports'. For individuals who have performed at a high level in their sports careers, in this case professional sportspersons, BLOSO has specific rules regardless of the nationality of the sportsperson.

Holders of a degree in physical development from higher education may also apply for a reduction of study time. The Flemish Trainers School (VTS) applies a general assimilation table that is constantly updated. This lists many foreign and previous Belgian courses that give entitlement in the VTS to an assimilation (= equivalence) with one of the existing VTS training courses. On the basis of this table, the dispensations for specific subjects are applied for in writing from the Flemish Trainers School. They may be requested before the start of a course and not later than two weeks after the start of the course and receipt of the course texts. A copy of the degree must accompany any dispensation for a course listed on the dispensations table that is not given by the VTS itself.

An important point in this context is that assimilation with a specific level does not always immediately give access to a training course at a higher level. In this case,

additional conditions are frequently imposed that are described in the conditions for admission (in this case a 'general section').

3.3.2. Description of the present relationship between academic standards, professional standards and vocational standards.

Currently, there is only a relationship between the level of professional standards and academic standards. A bachelor's degree may be conferred by colleges and universities. However, there is a clear distinction between a professional bachelor (Higher Education of one cycle) with its own vocational goals and an academic bachelor (University and Higher Education of two cycles).

The difference between the different bachelor's degrees is important in terms of market value and in terms of access to the master's degree.

Access to a specific master is described very "specifically". In terms of market value, nothing much changes. Professional bachelors can easily join the labour market after 3 years. Academic bachelors will, in practice, usually first obtain a master's degree before taking the step into the labour market.

Access to the masters is normally reserved for academic bachelors. For each master, at least one "academic" bachelor gains direct access. Other academic bachelors can also gain access, either directly or via a "preliminary programme". "Professional" bachelors are also admitted to a master's degree after following a "switch programme".

In terms of specific occupations, assessment standards have been drawn up that lead to a certificate of experience. For every certificate of experience, specific standards are drawn up for each occupation by SERV. These occupational standards consist of the professional competence profiles that describe what may be expected of a practitioner of a given profession. The occupational standards for the certificates of experience are therefore 'assessment standards' that will be applied in a test situation.

3.3.3. Quality assurance

3.3.3.1. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In the decree for the introduction of a number of measures for the restructuring and 'flexibilisation' of higher education in Flanders, the Flemish Government was made responsible for a five-year evaluation of how the associations and institutions attend to the quality assurance of their RAC procedures and their dispensation procedures. The Flemish Government develops the necessary measures for implementation. Quality assurance relates to the transparency, accessibility and regularity of applied procedures and methods (Vlaamse Overheid, 2006).

3.3.3.2. WORK

In the Education and Training 2005-2006 policy letter, initiatives were undertaken to maximise the potential of the **workplace** as a learning environment. To this end, it is

necessary to incorporate quality guarantees into on-the-job learning systems. This requires a general framework to be developed. This framework must offer the possibility of exploring how on-the-job learning may be certificated in order to link learning and work-based courses more explicitly to RAC procedures. An applicant for a certificate of experience who does not yet have all the required competences may then be advised to acquire those competences via training, via on-the-job learning or via a combination of the two (Policy Letter Education and Training 2005-2006).

Commerce and industry must be involved in the quality assurance of on-the-job learning. Companies must grow into learning environments. To increase employability within the workplace, employers must be able to ensure that there is training in job-specific or workplace-specific competences. They will also have to examine the extent to which they can offer a quality learning environment. Content-related, formal and organisational conditions and quality indicators have been developed to guarantee the quality of on-the-job learning (Policy Letter Education and Training 2006-2007).

Quality assurance for the **certificate of experience** involves a number of different components. A first component is an unambiguous and uniform standard in which clear guidelines are connected to the assessment. For the choice of test centre, a number of general criteria are used such as a quality label, the expertise of the test centre and the presence of two assessors. These general criteria are supplemented by specific criteria depending on the certificate of experience to be obtained. Specific criteria include evaluation of expertise in the occupation, assessment of competences, an appropriate assessment procedure and so forth.

3.3.3.3. CULTURE, YOUTH and SPORTS

According to the strategy on RAC in socio-cultural education, quality assurance is regarded as an important condition for the legitimacy of an RAC system. Since the decree requires the socio-cultural adult education organisation to work according to the principles of integral quality assurance, recognition of the decree is sufficient to show that the organisation is operating in a qualitatively acceptable manner. In that sense, it safely may be assumed that the training offered will also be of a qualitatively acceptable nature. However, the **government** cannot as yet **be the guarantor** for the training certificates issued in the socio-cultural sector. It is left to the discretion of training providers as to whether they issue learning certificates or not. This applies for the accredited training providers, where there is a degree of control, as well as non-accredited training providers. Nor is the Government able to guarantee the quality of certifications delivered in youth work.

The strategy on RAC in socio-cultural education makes a number of **recommendations** in the context of issuing competences certificates (which, unlike a learning certificate, shows that some form of assessment has taken place): "If an organisation issues competences certificates it must further be able to demonstrate that the procedures and instruments used score positively with regard to reliability (...) and validity (...). Non-accredited or non-subsidised organisations must first undergo an audit procedure (conducted by an external agency) to show that they operate to a high quality standard."(Socius, 2006b)

Responsibility for the quality assurance of certificates in the sports sector lies with BLOSO. This is taken as a given for the sports staff training courses organised by the VTS. As for the obligatory refresher courses, BLOSO/VTS recognises only those courses organised by the VTS partners. Further training can also be recognised for specific target groups (sports officials, lifesavers, club committee members, ...) that are organised by Instituut voor Sportbeheer (ISB), the Vlaamse Reddings Centrale (VRC), Belgisch Olympisch en Interfederaal Comité (BOIC), Sportac and the accredited sport medical examination centres.

SUMMARY

Many initiatives have yet to be undertaken in terms of the technical regulation of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. A clear procedure has been developed only for the Work policy area and, more particularly, for the recognition of competences by means of a certificate of experience. Procedures are in place for the recognition of acquired competences in higher education, but there is still no harmonisation between the different responsible institutions (the Associations). Work must still be done around other technical elements such as credits, and quality assurance must be introduced in a number of areas. That is especially true in terms of training courses in the socio-cultural sector. A quality assurance system that is accepted by all the parties, sector-specific or not, would in any case be an indispensable condition for an integrated RAC policy.

Chapter 4: The attitude of the stakeholders

In the second chapter we considered the vision behind the policy. In this chapter we consider the characteristics, vision and attitude of the stakeholders working in the sector and within the relevant policy areas. We limit ourselves to actors within the non-formal context and draw a distinction here between actors involved in labour-market-driven training and actors in “lifewide” learning.

After describing the stakeholders, we look at access to and participation in informal and non-formal learning. The chapter ends with a discussion of potential areas of tension between the policy areas.

4.1. Characteristics of the stakeholders

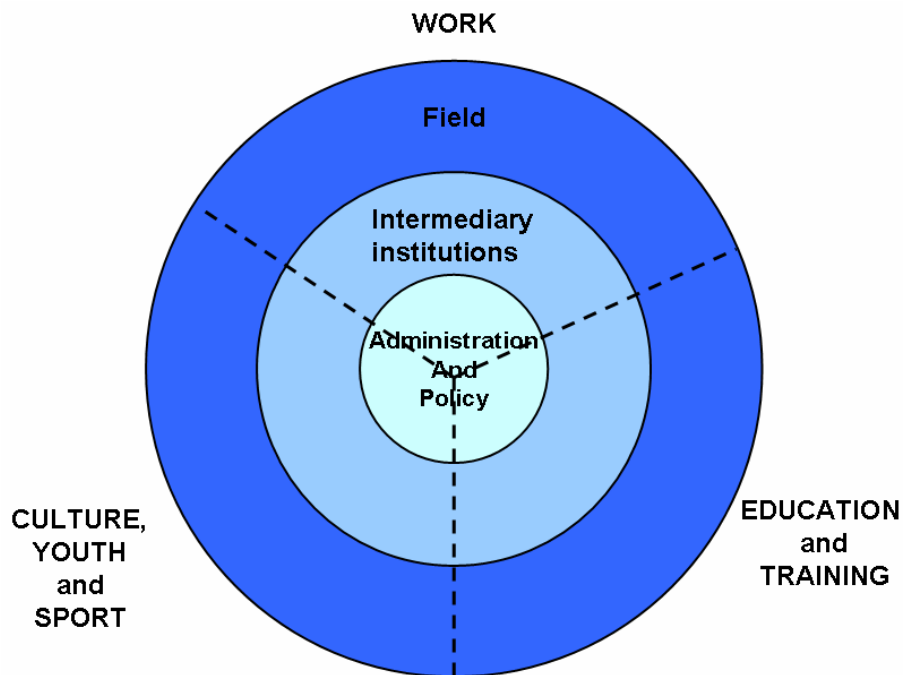
Before we look at the characteristics of the stakeholders and their various viewpoints on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, we repeat the definitions used by the OECD (OECD, 2005) to determine the difference between formal, non-formal and informal learning:

- *Formal learning*: is regarded as learning via an instruction programme within an educational establishment, a vocational training or competences centre for adults, or on the job, that is usually recognised by a qualification of a certificate.
- *Non-formal learning*: is regarded as learning via a programme that is not usually evaluated and does not lead to a certificate.
- *Informal learning*: is regarded as learning resulting from activities related to the job, family life or leisure time.

As we stated in the introduction of this report, the difference between formal and non-formal learning on the basis of these definitions is not always very clear. The distinction is apparent where formal learning corresponds with courses in regular education, but it is less clear where the border is between non-formal learning and education and training centres for adults. Strictly speaking, these courses come under the umbrella of formal learning. However, these institutions are also leading actors in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Below we explain the characteristics of these stakeholders and focus on their role in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and not on their supply of formal education and vocational training courses.

To take a concrete look towards the future of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, a qualitative survey was conducted among relevant stakeholders. The survey was based around the following approach:

A total of twenty stakeholders were interviewed:



Administration and Policy

- **Education and Training**
 - Administration Higher Education
- **Work**
 - Department for Work and Social Economy
- **Culture, Youth and Sports**
 - Department for Culture, Youth, Sports and Media
 - IVA SCW J&V – Youth department
 - IVA BLOSO (sports administration)

Intermediary institutions

- **Education and Training**
 - VLOR
- **Work**
 - SERV
 - VOKA
- **Culture, Youth and Sports**
 - SoCiuS
 - FOV
 - Steunpunt Jeugd
 - Vlaamse Jeugdraad

Field

- **Education and Training**
 - VOV
 - VOKANS
 - VVS
 - Steunpunt Lokale Netwerken
- **Work**
 - VDAB
 - SYNTRA Vlaanderen
 - ACV
 - ACLVB
 - ABVV
 - VIVO
 - VCSPO
- **Culture, Youth and Sports**
 - VFJ (now: FORMAAT Jeugdhuiswerk vzw)

In-depth interviews were used to question stakeholders about the position, role and vision of the institution they represent in informal and in non-formal learning. We asked them how the process of recognition of acquired competences should operate and what they expect of it in the future. The interviews also examined stakeholder positions in relation to developments in the other policy areas. This gave us a picture of the potential disjuncture between different policy areas.

Before we go into more detail, it is important to first make some general observations. It has to be said that discussing non-formal and informal learning is much easier in terms of the recognition of acquired competences. A second observation is that there is significant **terminological confusion** regarding the phrases informal learning and non-formal learning. The difference between the two is certainly not always clear to stakeholders. For many stakeholders, especially for those in the 'Work' policy area, the difference was not even relevant. Institutions such as SERV and VDAB find this division surplus to requirements because it is a question of the competences in general, not the way those competences have been developed. For training courses in socio-cultural adult education, the border between the two forms of learning is, again, not always clear. We quote here from an interview with a relevant stakeholder:

"Suppose you're on a day trip to Bruges being led around by a guide. By the end of the day you've picked up a lot of information about the history of the City of Bruges. Did you learn that in an informal or non-formal way? You took your day trip in your spare time, with the family, conducted by the guide who was following a clear programme ..."
(edited quote from an interview with stakeholder)

In other words, the difference between non-formal and informal learning is not relevant for certain stakeholders (especially in the Work area) and, for others (especially in the policy areas of Culture, Youth and Sports), not always easy to distinguish.

A final general remark is that we **did not find a single stakeholder** who spoke **negatively** about the recognition of acquired competences. The recognition of acquired competences is seen as a positive development by all stakeholders without exception. It is interesting to note that the three policy areas each place their own very individual emphasis, which may be a source of possible tension. Looking at these areas of tension, explicit or otherwise, is important for the further development of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Indeed, all stakeholders agreed that in order to increase the civil effect, certificates linked to competences must be approved by all relevant parties.

The interviews with stakeholders from Education the policy area reveal a **hierarchy** between formal, non-formal and informal learning. The interviewees here are, in the first instance, concerned with regular formal education. They saw the possibility of finding a connection between non-formal learning and formal learning. This was expressed in concrete terms through the idea of offering reduced-duration learning programmes on the basis of RAC for courses followed in training centres (other than those of regular education) and non-formal learning in general. Greater scepticism is apparent regarding the connection between informal learning and formal education.

4.1.1. Actors in labour-market-driven vocational training

As stated above, the market of labour-market-driven suppliers has expanded considerably. However, most of the training and courses relate to formal learning. We shall therefore limit ourselves looking at the more important actors for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Flanders.

The Sociaal Economische Raad van Vlaanderen - SERV

The 'Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen' (SERV) is the consultation and advisory organisation of the Flemish social partners. The SERV includes ten employer representatives (BB, Unizo, VCSP0 and Voka - Vlaams Economisch Verbond) and ten representatives from the employee organisations (ABVV, ACLVB and ACV).

SERV is the principal consultation committee for the social partners. In it, they discuss and agree their joint position and formulate recommendations and advice. Its representative composition gives SERV a solid basis in society.

In terms of Work policy, SERV is therefore the main actor in terms of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in general and for the recognition of competences in particular.

The vision of SERV regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is very labour-market-oriented. The emphasis is on matching competences to the needs of the labour market. Attention is paid to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the labour market. Overall, the development and recognition of competences are priorities, not the learning path that was followed. *In concreto*, this means that consultation on the process for recognising competences proceeds primarily through the labour market partners. The suppliers of education and vocational training courses have a secondary role. The recognition of acquired competences is regarded as a priority because it caters

to the needs and requirements of the labour market. In Flanders, there are bottleneck occupations for which there are too few applicants. An alignment between the various policy areas (Work, Education, Culture, Youth, Sports and Media) as far as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is concerned, is less of a priority for these stakeholders. The labour market players from the various sectors are caught up in the recognition of acquired competences and are delighted about developments around the certificate of experience.

As an umbrella organisation for the sectors, SERV is the most important actor for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Using the occupation profiles, SERV determines the conditions an occupation must satisfy and which competences are necessary for that occupation. Following on from this, SERV also sets the conditions necessary for the certificates of experience (see 1.4.1.).

Turning to the suppliers of labour-market-driven education and vocational training courses, we see that the field is highly fragmented on the basis of the target group. Indeed, for almost every target group there is an organisation in Flanders that concentrates on its particular needs and requirements. It is therefore not possible to map in detail the potentially relevant organisations within the confines of this report. We have selected a number of these organisations to look at, but wish to state expressly that practically every one of the organisations are running initiatives on the recognition of acquired competences. Organisations such as VIVO, KIKO and SPK, for instance, play important roles (e.g., test centre) in the assessment procedure for the 'out-of-school child care worker experience certificate'. Similarly, the Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid (FVB) undertakes this role for the experience certificates for 'industrial painters' and 'tower crane operators'. ATEL vzw with Randstad CallForce does so for the 'call centre operator' experience certificate, UBK/UCB vzw does it for the 'hairdresser and hair stylist parlour manager' experience certificate, and the Vocational Training and Employment centre of the OCMW does it for the 'removals carrier and removals packer' certificate of experience. In the framework of the present study we chose the organisation VIVO as most important actor in the social care sector.

Vlaams Instituut voor Vorming en Opleiding in de Social profit (VIVO vzw)

VIVO vzw was founded in 2000 via a protocol agreement between the Flemish Government and the social partners. It is jointly managed by representative employers' and employees' federations from the private and public social care sector.

In the present Sectoral Action Plan, concluded between the Flemish Government and VIVO, the scope of operations is split into 4 themes:

- Job-seekers
- Education / labour market relation
- Diversity policy
- Lifelong Learning

VIVO was involved in two RAC projects:

- the evaluation and recognition of nursing competences acquired earlier and elsewhere (see Chapter 5)
- RAC for the out-of-school child care worker.

The recognition of acquired competences is a priority for VIVO. After all, it offers the potential to meet the needs of the labour market. Within the labour market, for example, there is a lack of nurses working in child care. Using a recognition procedure for acquired competences, many individuals with practical experiences are able to enter these occupations. However, VIVO states that the quality of the nurses is a priority. For VIVO it is not an option to lower the standards attached to these occupations in the framework of RAC. The monitoring of the quality of these occupations is therefore particularly important. In the same context, reference is made to qualifications in nursing from countries other than Belgium. Without going into more detail regarding the quality of the foreign qualifications, there is an important cultural dimension to these occupations. A proof of acquired technical and theoretical competences is no guarantee of knowledge of this cultural dimension – such as language or the values and norms for health and hygiene or for child care in Flanders.

As well as vocational organisations, we can distinguish between organisations targeting specific groups the labour market supply side. We provide an overview of some of the organisations targeting job-seekers (VDAB), enterprises (SYNTRA Vlaanderen) and the socially disadvantaged (VOKANS and SLN).

Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding - VDAB

The 'Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding' has existed since 1989. VDAB is under the supervision of the Flemish Minister with responsibility for Work. It has a social and an economic mission. The social mission is directed towards strengthening the link between employee and employer and, therefore, towards the inclusion of the individual in the labour market. Work on personnel policy proceeds by means of service delivery (employment agency work, education and vocational training, careers guidance).

The VDAB offers a number of flexible vocational training courses. In order to make them as professionally relevant as possible, the courses are run in close cooperation with industry. This means that they take a number of forms of delivery, such as:

- collective courses in VDAB vocational training centres,
- apprenticeships and training in companies and accredited training centres,
- individual vocational training in a company,
- individual vocational training in an educational course,
- open learning,
- distance learning,
- web-learning.

By late 2006, all VDAB vocational training centres were restyled as competence centres. The new name hints at an extension of the operations of the centres. In addition to technical courses, the centres are now also focus on careers guidance, certification and the provision of information.

Unemployed individuals or people looking to progress in work (e.g. those wishing to do justice to their competences) may consult the career guidance officers at the VDAB. The VDAB has been issuing certificates, such as the European Driving Licence, for some considerable time and will in future be certificating more competences in consultation with the various professional sectors.

The vision of the VDAB regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is quite clear. The difference between informal learning and non-formal learning, and even formal learning, is unimportant. Even the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning *per se* is not important. The attitude of the VDAB is entirely directed towards the connection between the individual and the labour market. For this institution, it is therefore also important to match the needs for certain competences in the labour market with a supply of individuals with the required competences. It makes no difference where those competences were acquired. The recognition of any form of learning is therefore meaningful only if the competences acquired in the learning process connect with the needs of the labour market. With this objective in mind, the VDAB supports experience certificates and a number of instruments are being developed to test the competences of job-seekers, such as computer and language competences, and job-specific knowledge, such as car mechanic, bricklayer, ... and, more recently, refrigeration technician.

The VDAB follows the current procedure for the certificate of experience and hopes to be able soon to extend the range of occupations in cooperation with the Government and SERV.

Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming - SYNTRA Vlaanderen

SYNTRA Vlaanderen is the most important stakeholder in Flanders for the development and delivery of training courses for entrepreneurship. SYNTRA Vlaanderen also runs projects (e.g., ESF) and action programmes (e.g., the Leonardo da Vinci programme) in cooperation with Flemish and other partners, drawing on external resources sometimes provided by the European Union.

The vocational training work of SYNTRA Vlaanderen is accredited and funded by the *Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming - SYNTRA Vlaanderen*. This Flemish government institution designs the learning programme and provides quality assurance.

The vocational training courses of SYNTRA Vlaanderen are officially recognised by the Flemish Government. The diploma or certificate awarded on completion of the course is certified by 'Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming - SYNTRA Vlaanderen'. That means that the vocational training courses of SYNTRA Vlaanderen are included in the formal learning context and do not fall within the scope of this assignment. SYNTRA Vlaanderen is nonetheless a leading actor in the recognition of non-formal learning. It not only provides labour-market-oriented vocational training courses, it also offers training courses that are more closely directed towards leisure activities. No official certificates are awarded for these training courses, but the courses are recognised by SYNTRA Vlaanderen.

SYNTRA Vlaanderen targets learners intending to start their own businesses. To this end it offers a number of vocational training courses in which the emphasis (e.g., basic knowledge of company management) is placed on the ultimate aim of the training course, namely becoming self-employed. The vocational training courses given by SYNTRA Vlaanderen make use of SERV's occupational profiles (if there are existing profiles). Given the overall aim of the course, this profile forms the minimum requirement for the training. SYNTRA Vlaanderen recognises the importance of the certificate of experience but raises the concern that the standards for the certificates is lower than its own vocational training courses, although both are based on the SERV occupational profile. Does this mean that different standards should be applied for particular occupations?

SYNTRA Vlaanderen would prefer to see the SERV standards take better account of entrepreneurship and develop different 'sorts' of standards, for example, hairdresser as employee and self-employed hairstylist. The certificate of experience for a self-employed hairstylist would then take account of the extra competences that a self-employed hairstylist must have (ditto the SYNTRA training course).

A further problem in the harmonisation of acquired competences or certificates relate to the conditions for becoming employed by the government. SYNTRA Vlaanderen cannot engage an accountant it has trained and whose certificate has been recognised by the government as it is a public institution and can therefore only recruit someone with a higher education degree. The same situation currently applies to the certificate of experience. The Department of Work and Social Economy moved towards introducing the experience certificate for the Flemish Government, but this requires a federal Royal Decree, which cannot be done in the short term.

The recognition of acquired competences is organised in the local training centres of SYNTRA Vlaanderen. Following the model for higher education, the file is processed by the local centre (e.g., by the teaching staff). SYNTRA Vlaanderen consequently has no uniform approach to the process.

Vormings- en opleidingskansen -VOKANS

vzw VOKANS, in full 'Vormings- en opleidingskansen' (Vocational Training and Education Opportunities), was set up on 6 February 1990. It is a non-profit organisation based around the ACV and ACW trade unions. It aims to increase and perpetuate the employment opportunities of job-seekers and employees and has been recognised and funded for some time as a vocational training and employment organisation.

VOKANS is running or has already conducted a number of projects on the recognition of acquired competences. The '**competentiespiegel**' ('competences mirror') is directed at recognising the various forms of acquired knowledge, abilities and attitudes from a non-formal framework. Specifically, it targets low-skilled women with little work experience of relevance to the labour market. These women will consequently be better screened and more efficiently steered towards labour-market-oriented training courses and thence towards regular employment. The '**E=MC2**'-project offers unemployed or disadvantaged groups more concrete prospects of employability by motivating these

groups and beneficiary organisations. Its proposed e-learning method is based on the RAC perspective. Through the application of the existing RAC methods, attempts are being made to achieve two development goals: first, the development of the client himself or herself and, second, developing supply among organisations within the labour market. The e-learning instrument is important for making sense of this dual motivation and the project is designed to tackle the challenge of individual motivation and to provide substance via the e-learning of competences (e-learning van competenties - eVC).

Steunpunt Lokale Netwerken – SLN

SLN - the Flemish Support Point for Local Networks – co-ordinates local non-commercial suppliers of training courses for entry into employment. These organisations are also referred to as 'third parties' (besides the commercial and public players in the labour market).

The third parties direct themselves towards the job-seekers (and towards people in employment) who could benefit from extra guidance. Their activities concentrate on the training and coaching of people who, for all kinds of conceivable reasons (origin, educational attainment, health, ...), find themselves at great distance from the labour market and regular employment.

The Support Point Local Networks have been active since 1991 and were set up to support third parties and to represent them at the Flemish, local and sub-regional level. The SLN now has 140 members.

The members of the SLN offer a wide range of training courses, coaching and work experience projects for job-seekers and people in employment. They target disadvantaged groups and people whose position in the labour market is vulnerable, suing for innovative methods and bespoke approaches. With suitable coaching or work experience, the chances of employment may be increased considerably. The third parties mainly work with the training and work experience instruments that have been made available by the Flemish Government.

The vision and attitude with regard to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning of VOKANS and SLN is remarkably similar. The recognition of other-than-formal types of learning - and especially the recognition of competences - offers great opportunities for the employment of marginalised and disadvantaged groups that tend not to be in possession of a certificate from the formal learning circuit. However, both organisations speak very openly about 'a chance', expressing with no less candour their doubts in terms of delivery in practice. They are concerned, for example, about the awarding of experience certificates. It has been remarked that the experience certificates represent lower standards than the occupational profiles, but it is also pointed out that these standards do however involve highly developed competences. The target group that these organisations work with will only be able to reach this minimum standard in exceptional cases only. This, of course, does not mean that the standards for experience certificates or occupational profiles will have to be lowered, but rather that attention will have to be paid to occupations that cater specifically to the

needs and opportunities of the target group. Reference is made, for instance, to the possibility of an experience certificate 'cleaner (M/F)'. Such occupations may, however, be covered by limited competence possibilities.

A further pertinent criticism is that discussion on the recognition of acquired competences is overly tied to thinking in terms of degrees, instead of being developed as an alternative. A second major criticism is that the renewal of education in the light of acquired competences is hierarchical and extensively structured and that the minimum requirements are imposed top-down, that is, from the colleges. In reality, this means that the requirements of secondary education must connect at the level of the colleges, and that basic education in its turn must connect at the level of secondary education. The fear is that the thresholds will still be too high for the disadvantaged and that, once again, they will fall by the wayside. It would have been much better received if the renewal of education had been initiated bottom-up rather than the other way around. With current developments, there remains the fear that will at the upper end of society individuals will have extensive portfolios, it will be much more difficult for individuals at the bottom to acquire even one certificate, if indeed any at all. This could lead to serious social problems, because the intended psychological effect will have been utterly lost. This situation is incidentally not quite as surreal as we may imagine. Many disadvantaged people have ended up in this situation because they were unable to cope with tests or examinations, so they become embedded as being 'low-skilled'. Approaches such as competences certificates (see above) should provide the opportunity to address this issue, although this too will involve tests and examinations to prove competences.

As final stakeholder in the Work arena is the vereniging voor opleidings- en ontwikkelingsprofessionals - VOV). We mention this organisation because it may serve as a coordinating body for the broadest supply of non-formal learning in companies and organisations.

Vereniging voor opleidings- en ontwikkelingsprofessionals (VOV)

VOV is a learning network of professionals who deliver education and training processes in companies and organisations. It supports its members in the development of their competences which they, in turn, take back with them to the workplace environment.

Objectives

- Networking between members
- Professionalisation
- Transfer of knowledge, comparison of notes
- Multiple forms of learning
- Informal
- Networking with affiliated organisations in Belgium and beyond

VOV is a member of the ETDF (European Training and Development Federation) and the ASTD (American Society for Training and Development). It has more than 780 members (providers of education and vocational training).

The vision of the VOV regarding non-formal and informal learning is expressly directed

towards a professionalisation of organisations. Competences are the basis for processes such as function description and determination, competence management, competences profiles and the like. However, the determination of competences and the recognition of competences are processes that usually take place in the context of the organisation itself. Education and vocational training courses are usually customised for the organisation and are therefore difficult to generalise. The Dutch model is usually adopted, whereby the recognition of competences is organised and effected on a smaller scale. That means, in real terms, that the recognition of non-formal learning is not in itself a priority for the VCV, although that is certainly not the vision for all providers of education and vocational training courses affiliated to the VOV.

The final stakeholder we talked to were the trade unions. They see major possibilities in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning paths for the integration of disadvantaged groups in the labour market. There is a keen awareness of the importance of competences in the workplace, and action has already been taken on competence management. This can bring negative side-effects. There are, for instance, anecdotal accounts of employees who had successfully performed a particular task for many years suddenly becoming no longer suitable after a role evaluation. A further problem mentioned by the trade unions is remuneration. The trade unions feel certain reluctance on the part of the employers to recognise non-formal and informal learning, because they seem to fear that the employers would use this to extract financial compensation.

4.1.2. Actors in the area of life-wide learning

The Culture, Youth and Sports policy areas occupy a special place in the context of non-formal and informal learning. In contrast to providers of labour-market-oriented vocational training they lay great emphasis on the lifewide character of the learning experience in their sectors. 'Lifewide' is intended to recall that it is not simply a matter of learning as a function of employability or with a strictly economic value-added, but also learning as a function of personal development, active citizenship, social integration, ... (SoCiuS, 2006b). Lifewide concerns the learning content as well as the variety of life spheres where learning takes place: at home, in the sports club or youth movement, during a course ...

The socio-cultural education sector is - more than any other provider of education - oriented towards lifewide learning. There is an extensive range of (non-formal) training courses available, while participation in socio-cultural associations is an important source of informal learning. It should not be forgotten that besides adult education, there are a range of other areas that are involved in the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning, such as: libraries, the amateur arts, popular culture, the cultural and community centres and youth work. In the broad Culture policy area, moreover, non-formal education is also on the agenda in the professional arts and heritage sector.

In short, there is a broad and varied field of lifewide learning providers. Below we therefore limit ourselves to the development of the vision of socio-cultural education around non-formal and informal learning, as embodied in the "Erkennen van verworven competenties in het social-cultureel volwassenen werk" ("recognition of acquired competences in socio-cultural education") strategy. It, to a large extent, echoes the

views prevalent in the sector. While we mention a number of leading stakeholders, the field is too broad for the list to be exhaustive.

a) Socio-cultural work for youth and adults

Steunpunt voor sociaal-cultureel volwassenenwerk - SoCiuS:

SoCiuS is an autonomous organisation funded by the Minister for Culture to support the socio-cultural adult education sector. SoCiuS's mission is contained in the administrative agreement with the Flemish Government, which currently runs from 2004 to 2010.

For socio-cultural adult education, SoCiuS is an important stakeholder or representative at coordinating institution level. Socio-cultural adult education is one of the biggest institutional providers of non-formal learning and informal learning in Flanders. It is a leading actor or sector because it regards non-formal learning and informal learning as its core mission.

This stakeholder pays close attention to the strong economic impact of European (and also Flemish) thought in terms non-formal learning and informal learning and advocates more attention for the **social development of the individual**. The distinction between lifelong en lifewide learning is felt to be important in this context. The sector intends to **emphasis on lifewide learning**, because it is interested in aspects such as personal and social development and less motivated by economic considerations.

The attitude towards recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning contexts is nonetheless **positive** and **constructive**. SoCiuS, as coordinator for the development of recognition of acquired competences, would support the process of recognition, but points to the fundamental differences with the recognition of competences in Education and Work. Socio-cultural adult education will develop its own instruments and procedures and prefers to allow the providers of training courses/adult education themselves to choose the way in which they will or will not develop their training and whether they wish to recognise the acquired competences. This freedom is a crucial element in adult education.

The decree of 4 April 2003, relating to socio-cultural adult education, led to the introduction of two new types of organisation: the movements and the folk high schools (volkshogescholen). Besides the recognition of 13 regional folk high schools, three types of national training/adult education institutions were funded: thematically specialised training institutions, trade union training institutions and training institutions for special target groups (people with disabilities, prisoners). The 'Adviescommissie Vormingsinstellingen & Volkshogescholen' and the 'Federatie van Organisaties voor Volksontwikkelingwerk' are all important stakeholders for these new institutions.

Adviescommissie Vormingsinstellingen & Volkshogescholen:

This committee has a twofold mission. First, it has responsibility for the quality assurance of the recognition files and policy plans of funded and applicant socio-cultural education institutions. The advisory board formulates preliminary advice and advises the organisations and the Minister of Culture. Second, the advisory board supports the work of the socio-cultural folk high schools, offering advice to improve the working and policy

plans of the schools. This advisory board has a specific role to advise government but, on the other hand, does not directly represent the sector.

Federatie van Organisaties voor Volksontwikkelingswerk (FOV)

The 'Federatie van Organisaties voor Volksontwikkelingswerk' is an autonomous and independent non-profit organisation, set up by accredited organisations for socio-cultural adult education.

Since 2000, the FOV protected the interests of funded socio-cultural organisations in relation to government departments and other policy authorities. The FOV champions the socio-cultural sector, both in terms of individual organisations and the whole sector. All socio-cultural organisations that receive subsidies or that are seeking to obtain subsidy may become members of the FOV. In exchange for an annual contribution they receive support, advice and information regarding policy and regulation. The FOV team helps with applications for recognition and subsidy and there are currently 130 subsidized socio-cultural organisations affiliated to the FOV. This includes associations, training institutions, the Folk High Schools and socio-cultural movements.

The approach of the above institutions to the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning is very close to that of SoCiuS. The attitude is **positive** and **constructive**, but it is also made clear that the context of socio-cultural adult education differs radically from the learning context in education or in training courses. The differences are situated not only in the aims or objectives of the training, but also in the methods used. In other words, the application of instruments and methods from regular education is not possible. The question arises to what extent the recognition of non-formal learning paths will lead to a connection with formal education or with the labour market.

The Folk High Schools are important actors in the field of non-formal and informal education.

The Folk High Schools (Volkshogescholen - Vormingplus-centra)

The decree of 4 April 2003, relating to socio-cultural adult education, provides, under the title Socio-cultural education institutions, for the recognition and funding of one Folk High School per region, as determined by the Flemish Government. In the decree the term 'Volkshogeschool ("Folk High School") means a pluralistic organisation that pursues the objective of organising, structuring and coordinating the non-formal educational supply in a demarcated region. As well as a cultural and socially cohesive function, the folk high school has an essentially educational function and applies a socio-cultural methodology.

The decree provides for an annual subsidy. At least 2/3 of the subsidy must be paid out to professional staff. Following this rule, 13 folk high schools were set up on the basis of 30 existing training institutions and are now known as 'Vormingplus centres'.

The principal mission of the 'Vormingplus' centres is educational work. The promotion of learning for individuals and groups is central. Each centre also takes on assignments in the spheres of culture and social cohesion. The goal is to promote cultural participation, and to repair, promote or renew the social fabric in the region.

In concrete terms, each 'Vormingplus' centre has four tasks:

- development of its own non-formal education supply in the region. This may be realised using its own staff or personnel from other organisations;
- distribution of the supply across the region so that it is accessible to all local inhabitants;
- coordination and harmonisation of supply across the region in consultation with other cultural providers of non-formal education;
- provision of information on the coordinated, harmonised supply of learning to the inhabitants of the region.

Other stakeholders involved in the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning in the socio-cultural adult education sector are: 'Cultuur Lokaal' (support point for local cultural policy), 'Vlaams Steunpunt voor Vrijwilligerswerk' (support point for volunteers), 'Vlaams Centrum voor Openbare Bibliotheken' (support point for libraries), 'Forum voor Amateurkunsten' (support point for Amateur Art) and 'Vlaams Centrum voor Volkscultuur' (support point for heritage). Lack of space prevents us from describing these stakeholders in detail, but a summary shows that many sectors, organisations and institutions are involved in the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning. Beyond socio-cultural adult education and youth work, however, the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning in cultural sectors, such as the amateur arts, heritage and libraries, is still in the planning phase.

b) Youth

Besides the governmental department 'Sociaal-Cultureel Werk voor Jeugd en Volwassenen (SCWJV)', the following institutions are the important stakeholders within Youth policy:

Youth Council

The 'Vlaamse Jeugdraad' (Flemish Youth Council) is the official advisory body to the Flemish Government for all matters concerning children and young people. The Flemish Youth Council advises the Flemish ministers on any of its decisions that will impact children and young people. The Flemish Youth Council may also provide advice under its own initiative. The Flemish Youth Council represents children, young people and youth work in Flanders.

The Flemish Youth Council has **doubts** about the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning, although it maintains a constructive attitude. Youth work is an important provider of non-formal learning but considers it is marginally involved. The recognition of acquired competences is certainly considered to be important in employment and education, but the idea of a specific RAC procedure for youth work is seriously doubted. The specific character of Youth Work must be safeguarded and not become over-formalised. There is an absolute rejection of a separate RAC system for

Youth Work with distinct youth work certificates. According to the Flemish Youth Council certification of acquired competences does not have to concern its own sector. The decision to define everything in (learning) certificates worries the Flemish Youth Council. It would certainly entail considerable administrative costs, while for years there have been demands for simplification. The specific question that must be answered is: if we aim to think less in terms of diplomas, would we not be better to have fewer learning certificates? (Vlaamse Jeugdraad, 2005).

However, the Flemish Youth Council is **internally divided**. The 'Vlaamse Federatie van Jeugdhuizen en Jongeren centra vzw' (VFJ; now: Formaat), for instance, is particularly well disposed and regards itself as a pioneer in the story. This is also apparent from the cooperation with KIDS and KAVKA in the City of Antwerp within the framework of the project WACKER (see above).

Steunpunt Jeugd

Steunpunt Jeugd (Support Point Youth) is a non-profit organisation set up by the decree on Flemish youth policy and recognised by the Flemish Government. It is involved in youth policy from setting policy agenda to delivery and evaluation of that policy. In concreto the work of the Support Point is based on the following three pillars:

- providing impetus for an integrated youth policy;
- supporting youth work;
- collecting and deploying expertise for youth and youth work policy.

Support Point Youth is clearly **positive** towards the concept of the recognition of acquired competences and has already undertaken relevant initiatives. Following the other stakeholders in socio-cultural education, the emphasis is on the need for the sector to have its **own interpretation** of the story in order to assuage its prevailing fear of formalisation. With the recognition of acquired competences, Support Point Youth sees the opportunity to bring structure to the splintering of the training supply and to optimise the quality of the training courses. The Support Point, as such, does not dismiss the positive civil effect of training on the labour market. It does not, however, believe that training courses must be aligned to the needs and requirements of the labour market.

c) Sports

Besides BLOSO²¹, the Flemish sports administration, the following organisations are the main stakeholders in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning for the policy area of sports:

²¹ In full: 'agentschap voor de Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en de Openlucht recreatie' (or the agency for the Promotion of Fysical Development, Sports and Open air Recreation).

Vlaamse Trainerschool (VTS)

Anyone wishing to become a trainer or instructor in a sports club, sport camp, sport association, etc., can approach the Flemish Trainers School (VTS), which is partnership between BLOSO, the sports federations and the universities and colleges with physical development courses. Besides sports-oriented staff training courses, the VTS also organises vocational training courses such as advanced lifesaver, swimming bath coordinator and sports official, as well as refresher and supplementary courses for sports officials and committee members of sports clubs and sports federations.

The Flemish Trainers School has dealt with the recognition of acquired competences for some years now. The most obvious example is the recognition of the competences of non-Belgian sportspeople using objective criteria, such as the level at which the sport was practised. Recognition of the competences of individuals who have not practised a sport at a demonstrably high level is much more difficult to assess. In that context, the **cost price** of the procedure is an important factor. The VTS does not have the capacity to examine a large number of applications for RAC. While it is therefore prepared to consider further possibilities for the recognition of competences, it is not willing to make its procedure more flexible without extra subsidy of personnel. The VTS also stresses the importance of **clear and integrated arrangements** with formal education.

Vlaamse Sportfederatie (VSF)

The VSF, the umbrella of the Flemish sports federations, aims to make a positive contribution to the development of high-quality sports federations throughout Flanders. It does so by supporting them, by acting as representative, by identifying their needs and by an advanced communication strategy.

Judging by the reaction of the VSF to the "RAC in socio-cultural adult education" strategy and the introduction of the 'learning booklet', RAC would not appear to be readily at home within the federations. As a sector, however, they do not wish to be left behind and are prepared to get involved in policy developments in these areas. They even take on responsibility for part of the pilot projects (e.g., RAC for administrative volunteers). For the Flemish Sports Federation, however, RAC is one of many fields of action. One important reason for this is that training courses organised by the FSF are intended as finishing courses for the staff of the affiliated organisations. The training courses are also short and must be seen in the light of being additional training. Recognition of these training courses is co-ordinated by the Flemish Government, which is positive for the civil effect and the quality of the training.

4.1.3. Providers of education

Besides the policy, the main stakeholders for Education, are advisory and coordinating organisations such as VLOR, VLHORA and VLIR.

The Vlaamse Onderwijsraad - VLOR

The Flemish Education Council is an independent advisory and consultation body. As

strategic advisory board for Education and Training, it plays an important role in the policy cycle in the preparation of education policy.

VLOR is independent of the relevant minister and the department. Its composition is representative. Everyone involved in education training is represented in VLOR: education organisations, institutions, users and social organisations. They discuss education policy and advise the Flemish Minister for Education and Training and the Flemish Parliament. The VLOR also wrote some advice papers about RAC.

The Vlaamse Hogeschool Raad - VLHORA

The Flemish Colleges Council is the consultation and advisory body of the Flemish university colleges.

VLHORA advises the Flemish Government on all aspects of policy relating to education in the university colleges, scientific research in project form, and the provision of social service and exercise of the arts. In consultation with the relevant institutions, VLHORA also organises and promotes all matters concerning the colleges.

The Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad - VLIR

The Flemish Interuniversity Council (FIC) is an autonomous consultation body financed by the universities. The FIC provides advice and draws up proposals for the minister on university education or science policy. In addition, the Council organises discussions among the university institutions on Quality Assurance for higher education and Accreditation (visitations and visitation reports), Education Policy, Research Policy, University Management and Administration.

Developments around the recognition of competences are an important task for the coordinating organisations. If, however, we mention the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning, the attitude becomes **more cautious**. The clear difference from formal education is soon pointed out and especially the use of standards and methods that guarantee the quality of the education. This is not the case for vocational training in non-formal learning contexts, and certainly not for informal learning paths. The recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning and, more especially, of the competences thereby acquired may, however, contribute towards the reduction of study time at the level of basic and secondary vocational education. It is more difficult to integrate this in higher educations. The recognition of competences is given some attention but, in practice, this amounts to the recognition of qualifications.

We also refer at this point to some leading education providers (Adult Education Centres, Basic Education Centres, ...) for developments in the recognition of acquired competences in education. The education and training aims are, however, directed more towards formal education and preparing students, although not exclusively, for the examining board of the Flemish Community. If necessary, the Adult Education Centres could organise their own examinations and issue certificates for 'second-chance' education - general training (under Article 38 of the Decree of 2 March 1999 for the

regulation of a number of matters pertaining to adult education). Students could also undertake the examination with the Central Examining Board.

Examencommissie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

The Examining Board of the Flemish Community is a leading stakeholder for the formalisation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts in the framework of regular education (basic, secondary and higher education). The 'student' may undertake examination at the Board to obtain a degree or diploma for a training course or a credit certificate for one or more course components.

Not unimportant to the story of the recognition of competences are the students themselves. In the framework of this assignment, students were given the chance to input through the Vlaamse Vereniging voor Studenten VVS²². They indicated clearly that they find the recognition of competences a very positive development, but stress that they do not agree to the use of different procedures in the different associations. They point to the danger of students being tempted to shop around with their competences and allow their choice to be swayed by the outcome of the RAC procedure.

4.2. Access and participation

The attitude and vision of the stakeholders is shaped by the actual context in which the learning takes place. Stakeholders from the Work policy would, in the first instance, look to vocational education, training courses or acquired competences, whereas stakeholders from regular education tend to look to developments in the field of education. In order to contextualise the attitudes of various stakeholders, we must look at access to and participation in the various forms of learning.

4.2.1. Participation in training courses - general picture

Research appears to show that the higher the level of academic attainment, the higher the degree of participation in training courses (formal, non-formal and informal). Whereas in 2002, 2.4% of the low educated population of Flanders participated in additional training, the figure for the higher educated population was 13.2%. Looking at the figures for the second quarter of 2002, Flanders is in the middle group compared with other European member states (resp. 7.7% for Flanders; 7.9% for EU15). This was still the case 2003: resp. 9.1% for Flanders and 9.7% for EU15. In 2004, that percentage rose to 10.8%, therein meeting the 10% target set by the Pact of Vilvoorde. In 2005, however, this norm was corrected by the European norm of 12.5% (Steunpunt WAV).

Participation in training courses, however, varies considerably by different groups in society.

²² VVS is the coordinating organisation for students' councils in Flanders.

Table: Percentage of the population (25-64 years) participating in a training course by age, educational attainment, labour market position and gender (Flemish Region, EU-25, 2004, reference period of 4 weeks, annual average)

%	Flemish Region	EU-25
25-39j	12.9	13.4
40-49j	10.2	8.6
50-64j	6.0	5.1
Low educated	3.9	2.6
Medium educated	8.6	9.6
Highly educated	18.0	18.4
Employed	11.4	10.4
Unemployed	12.6	7.2
Non-employed	5.2	6.9
Female	9.7	10.1
Male	9.9	8.6
Total	9.8	9.4

Source: Eurostat LFS, NIS EAK (Steunpunt WAV)

Table: Percentage of the population (25-64 years) participating in a training course by educational attainment in the Flemish Region, 2000-2005 (reference period 4 weeks)

(%)		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total	Low educated	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.9	3.9	3.7
	Medium educated	7.1	7.1	6.3	7.0	8.6	7.8
	Highly educated	13.4	14.5	13.2	14.5	18.0	16.5
Male	Low skilled	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.8	3.7	3.4
	Medium skilled	7.8	7.8	6.0	6.9	8.7	7.7
	Highly skilled	14.1	15.4	12.6	15.0	18.6	16.4
Female	Low skilled	2.2	2.4	2.1	3.0	4.1	4.0
	Medium skilled	6.3	6.5	6.6	7.1	8.6	8.0
	Highly skilled	12.7	13.5	13.7	14.0	17.4	16.7

Source: NIS EAK (Bewerking Steunpunt WAV)

The most conspicuous factor influencing participation is the level of academic attainment. Here there is a definite Matthew effect: people who are already well educated have a higher level of participation in additional training; low-skilled workers on the other hand participate least. Initial education is therefore very important for participation in permanent education and training. High achievers (with a university or non-university higher education degree) are accustomed to study, and they therefore

participate more in education and training in adult life. Low-skilled people - those without a higher secondary education diploma - often have fewer chances to participate in further education and training in adult life. In 2004, barely 3.9% of low-skilled people took part in training in the Flemish Region. The low-skilled across the EU25 cut an even poorer figure, with an average participation of 2.6%. The mid-skilled participate rather more often in training in EU25 (9.6%) than in the Flemish Region (8.6%). The high-skilled in Europe are approximately as active in permanent education and training (18.4%) as in Flanders (18.0%). The general increase in educational achievement in the population in recent decades therefore heralds a further increase of participation in permanent education and training (Van Woensel, 2006).

We may state that **participation** in lifelong and lifewide learning follows an **upward gradient**, but that policy must constantly pay attention to ensure that those traditionally less likely to participate within the Flemish population do not miss the boat. The Flemish Government has meanwhile introduced a number of measures designed to increase participation, such as the "training vouchers" (see chapter 1) for employees and employers and the training credit for employees. These **measures** are adjusted from time to time; for instance, the focus of the training vouchers for employees was recently shifted to the low-skilled and the medium-skilled to enable them to pursue 'second-chance' education and higher studies. Disadvantaged groups were also encouraged to use careers services as well as a vocational training course to support further development. Training vouchers could also be used for the recognition of acquired competences. (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2005).

In 2006, an increase of 9% in the use of training vouchers for workers was measured. The number represents almost 234.000 users on an annual base, meaning 12% of all Flemish workers. In 2006, 14,9% of the requests for training vouchers went to low educated people (-0,5 ppt. comparing to 2005), while 14,7% workers aged 50+ applied for the training vouchers (+0,9 ppt. comparing to 2005). Both groups remain relatively underrepresented in the training voucher system (23,7% of the workers is low educated and 19,7% is aged 50+).

4.2.2. Participation in non-formal and informal learning

The importance of (informal and) non-formal learning in the framework of lifelong learning can be appreciated by looking at the percentage share of formal education in the **training courses followed** in the age group 25 to 64 years. In 2004, some 1.7% (2nd quarter) followed a course in regular formal education, as against some 9.2% in non-regular formal education.

Learning outside the formal education system (e.g., non-formal learning) therefore takes place to a large extent outside the main education structures. However, the successful completion of such a learning path does not necessarily lead to the obtaining of an official diploma or certificate. Learning outside the formal education system may take place in education centres, at work, within social organisations or groups, as a supplement to courses in formal systems (art, music, cookery or Sports classes, private courses to prepare for an examination), via distance learning, seminars and conferences (Van Woensel, 2006).

Data collected among people having left full-time day education (2003-2004) reveals that 22.3% followed an additional education or training course during that survey year. According to training course providers, 36% followed a vocational training course given by a private training institute or an on-the-job training course.

Table: Provider of most recent supplementary education or vocational training course

	Percentage
Education (university, higher education, Open University, evening classes, weekend education, art school, basic education centre)	24.3
vocational training (self-employed professional vocational training by the van het VIZO, VDAB, police academy, army, ...)	17.4
a private vocational training institute or an internal on-the-job training course	36.2
a socio-cultural association, a trade union training institute, a training institution for people with disabilities, a library, a cultural centre or a Folk Highschool (see above)	13.6
other	8.5
Total	100.0
N	632

Source: SoCiuS, 2007.

Concentrating on students taking courses given by a socio-cultural organisation or institution, approximately equal numbers of men and women, and of young and older persons, appear to have participated. Here again, the most marked differences were found on the basis of academic attainment. Better educated and higher skilled people are over-represented as learners.

The reasons cited by the respondents for following a particular course confirm very clearly the specific character of the courses in the socio-cultural sector.

	Percentage
because I like to know things and do things	71.7
to learn new things	69.5
to develop myself	68.5
to increase my self-confidence	51.1
for pleasure	49.5
to meet people	44.2

to obtain an additional qualification	43.1
to increase my chances in the labour market	38.5
to graduate	34.8
because my work or vocational training obliged me to	33.6

To form a picture of **social participation** (meaning informal learning by participating in all kinds of associations in the socio-cultural field) in Flanders, we examine the data from a large-scale study of cultural participation of the inhabitants of Flanders (SoCiuS, 2007). In this survey (2003-2004), all family members between 15 and 85 years of age in a representative sample of 2 849 Flemish households were questioned about their social participation, including participation in associations and additional education and training courses.

The study shows that 70% of the respondents took part in association life, while 34% of the participants in an association also appear to have been involved in one or more monthly activities during the 6 months before the survey. These include vocational training, courses, workshops, debates, information evenings, staff training, lectures or conversation groups

in terms of informal learning, reference must also be made to the various forms of **self study**:

- Self study using printed material (books, guides, specialist journals or periodicals ...);
- Computer-assisted self study via the internet;
- Self study using radio or television, audio or video cassettes, or offline computer-assisted (CD-ROMs);
- Visits to a library, a learning centre, a trade fair, etc. (Van Woensel, 2006).

If these forms of learning are taken into consideration, some 28.5% of Flemish people participated in one or more forms of self study in 2003.

Table: Participation in various forms of self study (ref: 1 year) in relation to the total population (Flemish Region, 2003)

	%
One or more forms of self study	28.5
Self study using printed material	18.9
Computer-assisted self study via internet	16.2
Self study using radio or television, audio or video cassettes, or offline computer-assisted (CD-ROMs)	11.5
Visiting a library, a trade fair, etc.	16.4

Source: NIS EAK (Bewerking Steunpunt WAV)

Looking at participation in lifelong learning (formal, non-formal and informal) it may be stated that a **Matthew effect** is still at work in Flanders. Anyone who has enjoyed a broad education will also has a better chance of participating in education and training

courses in future. Besides the obvious **unequal opportunities** and the **financial base**, a HIVA study on lifelong and lifewide learning in Flanders also refers to the **role of formal education**. The hypothesis is that men and women must learn to learn, and that this learning process can best be developed in the period spent in formal full-time education (i.e., up to 18 years of age) (HIVA, 2003).

4.3. Challenges and obstacles:

A number of obstacles and barriers emerged from our talks with the stakeholders. These tensions must be eliminated through further development of the policy on informal learning and non-formal learning. We discuss these obstacles in terms of tensions between the different policy areas/fields and, if necessary, between the different levels.

Tension field: Culture, Youth and Sports vs Work

There is a very clear tension between the Culture, Youth and Sports policy areas and Work and Social Economy, with regard to the goals of non-formal and informal learning. It emphasises the difference between lifewide and lifelong learning and illustrates the fact that not every form of learning must lead to labour-market-relevant competences. By placing the emphasis on lifewide learning and the development of social, cultural and communications competences, socio-cultural adult education/youthwork ultimately aims to contribute to the imparting of values that are important for the development of the individual's critical faculties in society.

Against the backdrop of access to and participation in education and training courses, labour-market-oriented actors are principally concerned about low participation among the low-skilled. The recognition of their competences could be a lever for filling vacancies in bottleneck occupations within the labour market. For Culture and Youth and, to a lesser extent, Sports, this argument is of only secondary importance. That is only logical if we consider the motives for participating in the socio-cultural sector. Indeed, the most important motives are not always driven by the labour market.

Tension field: Culture, Youth and Sports vs Education and Training

The main fear of the socio-cultural sector is that, due to the recognition of acquired competences, education and training would be excessively geared towards the diploma. Under the pressure of the current system in education, that would mean that training courses have to be highly structured and formalised, with clear objectives and assessment. According to the socio-cultural sector, this is squarely opposed to the motives and objectives of education today. There is a widespread impression that the debate on the design of the recognition of acquired competences is distorted by thinking in terms of the diploma, because the notion of a qualification still takes precedence over competences. The Culture, Youth and Sports policy areas therefore prefer to emphasise life-wide learning and the development of social, cultural and communications competences.

Tension field: Education and Training vs Work

Three criticisms are levelled by the Work and Social Economy policy area against Education and Training. The first criticism concerns the monopoly position of Education in the awarding of degrees. A second criticism concerns the speed of the entire recognition process for informal learning and non-formal learning. In what is probably a defensive reflex, the Education sector still does not open up its structures and programmes sufficiently. A third criticism concerns less the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning, but rather the recognition of acquired competences in general. For partners in the labour market, the distinction between informal, non-formal and even formal learning is irrelevant, neither here nor there. More important are the competences that a person has, regardless of where and how those competences have been acquired. Education insists that an individual's learning path in formal education includes more than merely following the course. Education also instils values, standards and attitudes that are socially relevant, and the acquired competences are contained in the diploma. This, according to employers, means certain advantages associated with the recognition of competences are undermined by education. Employers, after all, see in the recognition and concrete testing of competences the possibility of better recruitment processes. With the developments in competence management, role descriptions are being defined. However, these are of no value if education delivers, besides the diploma as proof of successful completion of the learning course, proof that competences that have been acquired on an extra-curricular basis that somehow belong to the course, but are not in fact tested. At present it is not always clear for the employer whether that evidence guarantees certain competences. If the graduate develops these competences anyway, without any concrete assessment, they must first be proven at work. Considering the success of competence management among employers, the labour market seeks to acquire as much control as possible over the assessment of these.

Conversely, the fear is expressed from educational circles that developments in the labour market on the recognition of competences are dragging down the standards of education. A further fear is that the recognition of competences developed at work will lead to more unqualified school-leavers. It is not acceptable to have a situation in which young people leave education because they are 'sick' of school, then enter the labour market with the knowledge that the recognition of the competences that they acquire there would have a greater civil effect among employers than would certain diplomas from education. In this way, 18-year olds with an educational deficit would be encouraged to develop competences in an employment context rather than through a diploma in secondary education. In this scenario, the young people would lack other competences that they may have acquired in a school context.

SUMMARY

The stakeholders we interviewed in the context of this report are, generally speaking, very well disposed towards the recognition of acquired competences. However, opinion is divided on the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning. For stakeholders from the Work policy area, only the competences are important, not the learning path. The Education and Training policy area is more concerned with the quality assurance of non-formal and informal learning paths, while stakeholders in Culture, Youth and Sports fear excessive formalisation. The conclusion of this survey is therefore

that the visions of recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning are quite divergent and that the drive for a further development of the recognition of informal learning and non-formal learning must be sought in the recognition of acquired competences, whether these happen to be acquired in a formal, informal or non-formal context.

Chapter 5: Case analysis with regard to advantages and obstacles

We turn our attention in this section to a number of interesting pilot projects and studies in Flanders within the framework of the recognition of acquired competences.

In socio-cultural education, economic and educational advantages are regarded as the “summative function” of RAC, while social advantages (social integration, social commitment, active citizenship) and personal development represent the “formative function” of RAC. For the purposes of the report, we have tried to distinguish between economic, educational, social and personal benefits. However, the results of the RAC pilot projects are not easy to reduce to a single denominator. These RAC developments often entail different benefits that are not of an exclusively economic or educational nature, but also have a strong social and personal component. The difference between economic, educational, social and personal benefits is artificial, and the various benefits complement each other rather than mutually exclude each other. Because economic and educational benefits on the one hand and social and personal benefits on the other often accompany each other, we opt here for a division between the benefits of the summative function of RAC and the benefits of the formative function of RAC.

5.1. Advantages attached to the summative function of RAC

The economic (but also non-economic) advantages and drawbacks will be made clear in the near future by the application of RAC within the framework of the certificate of experience. The **certificate of experience** is designed to identify and assess all the professional competences (regardless of learning path) of a person and to recognise the same via a certificate issued by the Flemish Government. These competences are always connected to a specific occupation. If, after testing, not all competences required for the occupation are present, the applicant is given advice regarding the further development path that he or she should follow. In this form, RAC is an alternative route for the recognition of competences besides the other types of evidence recognised by the Flemish Community. Critically, it has a dimension of development through the connection with person-specific advice. The assessment standards and success criteria are developed and validated by the social partners, the sector specialists for the occupation in question. One assessment standard is therefore adopted as the norm for each occupation for the certificate of experience in Flanders. The basis for recognition of the certificate on the labour market is therefore in place. (OVER.WERK Periodical of the Steunpunt WAV 2-3/2005). However, it remains to be seen whether and how it will be used in practice.

A number of pilot projects have been started up in the wake of the certificates of experience. In 2002, the ‘Vlaams Instituut voor Vorming en Opleiding in de Social Profit’ (VIVO vzw) received the mandate to map the acquired competences of nurses at bachelor level and develop examples of assessment and validation of those competences in cooperation with partners, colleges and the Risk Groups Fund of private hospitals. The main motivation, apart from the fact that these competences have never been clearly formulated in Flanders, was to compensate the shortage of nurses in Flanders through a

reduction in study time. Nursing training courses were becoming more dominated by candidate-students who had already acquired the relevant competences from earlier training courses or work experience, or via non-formal learning.

The reduction of study time must also ensure that more low-skilled people are able to access the nurse's diploma. The recognition of competences is also intended to raise awareness of and professionalise the sector (Vyt, 2005). At present, however, there are no known data on whether this objective has actually been achieved and whether disadvantaged groups do in fact now have better access to nursing training courses.

This pilot project culminated in the formulation of a number of recommendations that are representative of the results from other pilot projects and may form a recurrent theme for initiatives in the future.

1. The granting of dispensation for part of a course is at present only possible by granting the dispensation for a complete module. Candidates may sometimes not be granted dispensation for a complete module but may still possess a number of competences or partial competences. **Organising a module adapted to the individual might offer a solution for easing the transition to the regular modular path for these candidates.**
2. Regulation is a stumbling block for the organisation of placement assessment. Candidates cannot simply undertake a placement assessment in a hospital. Nursing is a regulated occupation whereby people without the required diploma cannot apply for the job. To satisfy the regulation at present either employment in a hospital is necessary or the candidate must be registered for a training course. In both cases, a number of conditions must be satisfied, such as possession of a recognised certification/diploma to be able to work in the medical care sector, or satisfying the regulations in connection with a probationary period. **Clear, flexible regulation in the organisation of assessments should render the procedure more accessible.**
3. A RAC procedure is an imposition for the school/institution. It is very labour-intensive, but it does have benefit for the candidate and for society. The shortening of study time via the organisation of an RAC procedure involves a minimum cost for the training of a candidate. The number of man-hours invested in the RAC procedure is not compensated, and the school does not even receive the support for the trainee/student that it would have received for a student following a complete training course. **One concession for such integration would be to compensate the charge to the school. The support of the candidate could thus be better organised and the candidate's prospects of success in the training course could be increased.**
4. The structured regional organisation of RAC procedures that could lead to a reduction of the training course would reduce the charges defrayed by all schools (a group of assessors consisting of other representatives from different schools would ensure uniformity). Cooperation with VDAB could also be an option for job assessment.

5. The target public for RAC procedures needs flexible training opportunities. Certain regions, for example Antwerp, have little in the way of supply of 'alternatively organised training courses'. **The creation of evening courses should be able to satisfy that demand**

6. Candidates with a non-recognised foreign diploma may apply for assimilation of their diploma from the Department of Education and Training. That recognition is affected by a number of criteria. The diploma is therefore declared equivalent to a diploma at a lower level. **The organisation of an RAC procedure could be a solution and may offer the candidate the possibility of obtaining a nursing qualification subject to completion of a short training course. A matrix of nursing courses (throughout Europe and the rest of the world) would be helpful to increase the transparency of the nursing training courses.**

7. Special attention is given to the necessity of Dutch for the further training of non-native applicants. Specific measures such as flexible cooperation with other training course providers and/or **the possibility of organising language coaching in the work environment may be a solution.**

Still within the social economy, a project was set up in the framework of the 'Title of Professional Competence' focusing on the professional competence of travel and tour guides in a joint operation with SoCiuS, Toerisme Vlaanderen and VDAB. The social economy, the so-called third sector, thereby acquires a clear position in the employment and vocational training sectors (Bal, 2003). That project has led to the setting up of a framework for competences acquired through the training course for travel and tour guides.

Mapping and identification of competences is, in any case, more helpful for access to particular occupations within the labour market. The mapping of the competences of out-of-school child care workers in the framework of a pilot project around RAC, for instance, led to the creation of an occupational profile. In cooperation with SERV, a check can be run on which competences an individual must possess in order to be admitted to the short training course. In 2006, this led to the introduction of the certificate of experience for 'out-of-school child care workers'.

In 2002, a number of pilot projects started in Education around the recognition of competences and the possibilities for **short training courses**.

One project focused on the recognition of competences around illiteracy. This project is very important for access to basic education and combating illiteracy. All too often, we are confronted with a lack of linguistic competences, despite the level of academic attainment. It also means that access is no longer limited on the basis of academic attainment but is now determined on the basis of the level of real competence and, consequently, on the basis of an estimate of the acquired (and still present) competences, assuming adequate screening methods. This screening must optimise the training time in literacy courses. Existing competences need not be learnt again and it must be possible to grant dispensations (Alfabetplan, 2006).

A second project was directed towards the recognition of acquired competences for teacher training (Carnel, 2005). The first draft of the teacher training decree was approved by the Flemish Government in early December 2006. However, that first draft had little to say regarding procedures for the recognition of acquired competences.

In higher education, the recognition of acquired competences has been a priority over the last academic year. Current possibilities to reduce study time are offered for many training courses in higher education on the basis of RAC. However, as long as there is no recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the procedure remains very intensive and will have difficulties linking with higher education.

For non-higher education, the RAC pilot project created possibilities to shorten study time and introduce flexible study paths in Adult Education Centres on the basis of the recognition of acquired competences. The colleges point out that differences between competences and qualifications sometimes cause difficulties.

5.2. Advantages attached to the formative function of RAC

Only time will tell whether the above developments and projects have any influence on the **position of the disadvantaged in Flemish society**. At the present moment, it is still too early to form an opinion. To explore the future influence, very specific indicators will have to be developed - bearing in mind the improving context for the target groups concerned. Increased activity will naturally lead to social benefits for the individual and for society. **Social benefits**, however, are linked to the development of social values, social cohesion, intercultural relations and the like. These are social benefits that are to be found pre-eminently in the socio-cultural sector, but also in education and in a work context. Socio-cultural education has had considerable experience in working with disadvantaged groups. It also has the advantage of being very accessible for people who have had negative learning experiences in formal education.

Looking at youth competences, the VFJ (Flemish federation of youth houses; now: *Formaat*) run the aforementioned project WACKER and the RAC Project West-Vlaanderen. The Flemish Federation of Youth Centres and Youth Club joined forces with the Province of West Flanders in this latter project, in which various actors work on the structuring and the systematisation of informal learning in youth centres and youth work in general. The goal of the project is to provide an instrument by which young people can consciously use the competences that they acquire through youth work. However, so far there are no available data for either project yet.

One project for which the pilot phase is now completed relates to voluntary work. The purpose of this project was to draw up a standard list of key competences that volunteer administrative staff could acquire. A method was also developed allowing the volunteers themselves to put together a personal portfolio. In the course of their work, volunteers amass a considerable amount of knowledge, abilities and know-how. It is therefore a social learning place *par excellence*. The volunteers themselves are also motivated to learn new competences in a new environment. Their CVs increasingly include analysis of the competences acquired as a volunteer (Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005). Besides positive comments regarding the application of RAC, some critics were also added. A sample of the points of the view included the following (Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005):

- the developed competences mainly concern key competences and interpersonal competences;
- the majority of volunteers take a negative view of the formal recognition of the learning effect of voluntary work;
- the RAC objective must primarily be defined in terms of the volunteer himself or herself;
- an external assessment at the request of the volunteer is usually considered in terms of a civil effect;
- the practical execution of an RAC procedure depends on its intended goal.

The search for a civil effect outside of the voluntary domain requires more widely applicable standards against which it is possible to test the competences with a certain guarantee of objectivity and reliability.

Volunteers are not inclined to reach for 'hard' assessment tests, but are more inclined to look to self-evaluation instruments, such as a personal portfolio. That may lead to an outcome that has value within voluntary work itself and, therefore, also within an organisation's own volunteer policy (correct placement and development of the volunteer) (Gillebeert and Leroy, 2005). However, this has limited general use.

The advantages as regards career development and the increasing of chances to succeed in the labour market or in education are also very important **at personal level**. Our talks with the stakeholders addressing employment opportunities and vocational training for the disadvantaged, placed particular emphasis on the **psychological benefits** that are attached to recognition of competences developed in a non-formal or an informal manner.

However, certain studies (Wouters & Douterlunge, 2002; Baert, 2004) reveal a number of barriers and obstacles to educational participation that are important in the light of lifelong learning. Besides the institutional and situational barriers, attention must also be paid to dispositional barriers such as lack of confidence, negative personal attitude towards education and training, perception of irrelevance of the benefits, lack of focus or control and lack of trust. It can be felt to be humiliating to ask a question because it is tantamount to admitting you have to learn something, that you 'can't manage on your own', and that you depend on other people, etc. In other words, the compulsion to be accepted as a valid individual prevents us from expressing a particular need, certainly when we give it educational expression.

Some respondents speak of a 'culture' in which it is neither accepted nor obvious that anyone would wish to learn in order to make up for a shortage. Informal learning can to some extent compensate this deficit approach from formal learning, but its learning effects are less substantial and powerful than the benefits offered by formal learning – partly as a consequence of the absence of accessible instruments for the recognition and validation of experiential competences.

SUMMARY

In Flanders, the advantages of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning still defy absolute measurement. For further steps, we must therefore look at the results of a number of test projects that have recently reached completion. Based on these test projects we may, however, form a number of conclusions that are important for policy

initiatives in the future. One important conclusion is that it is especially difficult to distinguish between the very specific economic, educational, social and personal benefits that are attached to non-formal and informal learning. The main reason is that Flanders does not have pertinent indicators to measure the benefits.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and challenges

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Flanders is still in its infancy. Structured thinking about lifelong learning and about competences acquired in non-formal and informal, or the recognition of acquired competences in general, arose around the year 2000. An **exploratory phase** in which attention was paid to a general description of the advantages and disadvantages of the recognition of acquired competences was followed by a phase of **policy intentions and action plans**. Up until then, thinking on the recognition of competences was still proceeding in very general and non-policy-specific terms. However, in the subsequent phase, with **pilot projects and initiatives** in different policy areas and at different levels, the general framework is lost. At the time of writing a phase in which the **results** of all these initiatives is taking shape; and the stakeholders from the various policy areas observe that there is clear lack of coordination between the different policy areas. The question is how **coherence** between the different areas is supposed to be obtained. Besides the setting up of pilot projects the stakeholders have also developed their own **vision** of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and in this they are clearly not all of the same mind. The differences of opinion mainly concern *recognition of non-formal and informal learning* and have less to do with the recognition of competences. We note, for instance, that the labour-market-oriented stakeholders do not see the first as priority and prefer to focus on the attainment of the competences. The stakeholders from Education and Training then raise questions regarding the way in which quality assurance will be organised for the informal and the non-formal learning contexts. Finally, the stakeholders from Culture, Youth and Sports provide the map for lifewide learning, thus positioning themselves alongside the view of the labour market of formal education that are mainly directed towards lifelong learning. The most important motive for this positioning is the fear in the socio-cultural sector of falling prey to economic and instrumental objectives that would undermine the motives of socio-cultural education. In this context, it is important to conclude that there is a great deal of **uncertainty** regarding the **definitions applied** and the **terminology**. After all, it is not always easy to distinguish between non-formal and informal learning – because the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is in the first instance carried out in terms of recognition of acquired competences.

As far as concerns the *recognition of acquired competences*, we may conclude that, one, **there is already widespread thinking on the subject** and, two, various **initiatives** have already been undertaken in the matter. In general, we must conclude from our research that there is a prevalent mood among the stakeholders that everything about RAC is rather **uncoordinated** and **ad hoc**, that everyone marches to the beat of a different drum, and that nobody quite knows what they are meant to be doing. That feeling is exacerbated by a certain **Babylonian confusion of language**, e.g., where the concrete evidence of the acquisition of specific competences or qualifications in a non-formal or an informal learning context is concerned. In the field of Work they talk about 'certificates' of experience'; in Education they speak of 'certificates of competence', while the socio-cultural sector uses 'learning certificates'. The question then is how these various certificates stand in relation to each other.

There are also **clear differences** in terms of the *technical implementation of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning*. The recognition of (competences acquired via) non-formal and informal learning is a process in different phases. After the necessary identification phase, there is a process of assessment and certification, with the associated development of assessment centres and standards for assessment. Different stakeholders do not all see that process running in quite the same way. It appears very likely that the process for the recognition of competences will be kept as it is for all policy areas. Only the labour market actors are positive towards independent recognition centres, even if these centres do work with the standards laid down by the sector (SERV) and the sectors must attend to quality assurance. Education would prefer to see to its own assessment of the competences connected with its institutions. The socio-cultural sector, including adult education and the youth sector, is fearful of radical formalisation. In addition to an administrative burden, the latter would also represent an attack on the specificity, the form and the objectives of non-formal education. That is why the sector wants to embed the freedom of conferring learning certificates onto the providers of education. At present, quality assurance is a matter of recognition on the part of the provider, but non-recognised education providers may also confer a learning certificate. In the Culture, Youth and Sports policy areas, however, opinion with regard to the recognition of acquired competences is still absolutely divided. Some are moved by their fears of formalisation; while others again stress the opportunities that RAC can offer for the individual. As far as youth work is concerned, opinions are even more highly divergent - between the Youth Council on one hand and, on the other, youth policy, the Support Point Youth and the organisations in the field.

The different paths for development create the strong impression that the story of acquired competences is being written at **very different speeds**. The labour-market-oriented actors drive the debate very visibly when it comes to the recognition of vocational competences; and they have already made the first moves in the form of experience certificates. In Education, RAC practices are most advanced in higher education and in adult education. The socio-cultural sector follows a different track.

This situation leads to a number of **points of tension** that will have to be addressed in the further development of the recognition of informal and formal learning. The stakeholders also agree that there is a pressing **need** at policy-preparation level **for a cross-policy transversal RAC framework** (incl. terminological reference framework) into which the different current and possible future RAC initiatives may be fitted.

On the other hand, the variety of views and instruments developed within the different policy domains display the dynamism of all stakeholders concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Looking to the future, an important emphasis should be placed **coordinating** the initiatives across the various policy areas. The existing initiatives should be compared in terms of comparability. For instance, it is not necessary that all competences relating to the policy area of Culture should be recognised formally. Even "certificates of learning" acquired by non-formal learning can have some relevance within the procedure to obtain a certificate of experience.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that within the framework of the Competence Agenda, the Flemish Government together with all relevant stakeholders, is at this very

moment dealing with the challenge of making the RAC-policy more coherent and integrated.

The development of a Flemish qualifications structure in the near future will indicate the intention on the part of the government to set up a structure with qualifications described in competences, regardless of the learning context in which they happened to be acquired. However, a qualifications structure of this kind requires all manner of arrangements and the involvement of diverse set of stakeholders. The question then arises as to how competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts may be deployed in the acquisition of qualifications. We must also investigate whether the existing supply of non-formal and informal learning does not encompass any qualifications that might be given a place in the qualifications framework.

Greater efforts must also be made to **register** the recognition of competences in the various areas and at the various levels and **monitoring** must be organised so that policy heads in the right direction.

Extra efforts must be made in adult education to promote and support RAC practices.

Judging by the interviews and the analysis, a **debate on the recognition of acquired competences** would therefore provide a more solid basis for arriving at a consensus on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning than would a debate on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning contexts.

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