



## **Belgium / Flanders**

### **SP5 National Report**

LLL2010: Sub-Project 5: Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe-The Contribution of the Education System.

#### **The access of adults to formal and non-formal adult education**

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This report is part of an international research project '*Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: the Contribution of the Education System*' (acronym LLL2010) to reflect state of the art results of the research still in progress.

The project involves researchers from thirteen countries and regions of Europe: Scotland, England, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway and Russia. Further information on the project is available online <http://LLL2010.tlu.ee>.

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## **INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The study at hand is part of the project '*Lifelong Learning 2010 - Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The Contribution of the Education System*' ('LLL2010'). As its title indicates, the central focus of the LLL2010 project is the contribution of education systems to the process of making lifelong learning a reality and its role as a potential agency for social integration (Project Summary). This is also the over-arching focus of this report.

The LLL2010 project includes five subprojects. Each subproject helps to achieve the objectives of the whole project. This working paper focuses on the research done in the Flemish Community (Belgium) on '*The access of adults to formal and non-formal adult education*', which is the fifth subproject (SP5) of the general LLL2010 project. This subproject was carried out between February and September 2009. It aims to provide an analysis of the role played by the education system in enhancing lifelong learning. More precisely, the aim of this subproject is to analyze the role of educational institutions and non-traditional educational contexts in the promotion of the access of adults to the education system. This report therefore provides an overview of the ways in which some specific formal and non-formal educational institutions try to enhance the participation of groups which are currently underrepresented.

This report starts off with a few remarks on the methodology that was used. This is followed by six different case descriptions or case studies. The case studies are preceded by some general information on the three different types of adult education under study: (1) formal adult education, (2) non-formal adult education, (3) prison education. When placing different educational institutions side by side, some issues become apparent. In the next section some common themes and contrasts across the cases are being analyzed and discussed.

This report also includes the full transcripts of two standardized interviews with government officials (one for formal adult education and one for non-formal adult education). You will find those in the final section.

We would like to express our appreciation to all the people who helped us find the right cases and offered us information on adult learning in Flanders. We are very grateful to them. We would like to express our special thanks to all interviewees for giving us information on their organization, projects and policy and for their important and helpful comments on the draft version of this report.



## **SECTION 1**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **1. Aim and objectives/research questions**

The intention of this subproject was to gain insight in the way educational organizations and contexts promote access of adults to adult education, formal as well as non-formal. The view of the policy makers (government officials with expertise in the field of adult education) is also incorporated in this report.

Consistent with the underlying goal of the promotion of social inclusion, this subproject pays specific attention to (minority) groups of adults underrepresented in lifelong learning and to adults from backgrounds of social marginalization. By this special attention this research wants to make a contribution in paving the way for more social equality and more opportunities for more individuals to acquire relevant individual, social, cultural, cognitive and ethical competencies.

The most important objectives of the Flemish country report of this subproject are (LLL2010 background document, 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2009):

- making a description (sources, policy, status, extent, features of context, etc.) of formal, non-formal and prison education with a view to a comparison of institutions across countries. Providing additional information on how the adult education system in Belgium (the Flemish Community) works;
- making an inventory of models of good practice, illustrated with sufficient detail to allow their use in other contexts and countries;
- identifying gaps and the assessment of obstacles and opportunities to fill these gaps.

#### **2. Methodology**

##### **2.1 Sample plan**

In this subproject we used the qualitative research method of the in-depth interview. In total, 15 individuals working in different institutions were interviewed. For gaining access to the interviewees a two-step approach was used.

As a first step in the sampling procedure six institutions were selected:

- three institutions for formal adult education;
- two institutions for non-formal adult education;
- one prison (where adult education is offered).

As a strategy to identify interesting institutions and cases, several intermediary organizations and experts were contacted. They suggested several institutions for adult education. These

institutions were contacted and received information on (1) the research project (2) how we found out about them (3) why we choose them.

In the sampling process it was important to give consideration to the diversity of adult education provision in Flanders. To create a maximum variation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in the selected institutions, different types of institutions were located with regard to several variables such as course content (degree of structure, knowledge status, etc.), learner volunteerism and intentionality, gender and ethnically diverse student populations, location, certification, etc.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium there are several different types of formal and non-formal adult educational institutions and contexts. The sample in this study reflects this diversity and the information collected demonstrates the variation in the educational sectors (see table 1.1).

In stage two of the contact and sampling procedure the interviews were arranged. The person that was contacted in the institution was asked to select one senior manager or project coordinator in the organization and one tutor (or teacher/lecturer/adult learning practitioner/worker in socio-cultural training/organizer of the educational programme). Both of them were contacted directly or through the contact person of the institution and were asked to participate in an in-depth interview.

In addition to the interviews with the managers and employees from the six selected institutions, two senior government department officials with responsibility for state policy in relation to access and underrepresented groups were interviewed.

All interviews took place face to face, between the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2009 and the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2009.

The two tables below offer information on the sample used in this study.



**Table 1.1** Sampling plan

	Type of education	Institution	Number of interviews	Interviewees	Institution/state official
A	Formal adult education	Institution 1	2 interviews	A1_01	Centrum voor basiseducatie Leuven – Hageland
		(A1)	(01, 02)	A1_02	
		Institution 2	2 interviews	A2_01	Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs - Sociale School Heverlee
		(A2)	(01,02)	A2_02	
B	Government state officials	Official 1 (B1)	1 interview	B1	State Department
		(01)			
		Official 1 (B2)	1 interview	B2	State Agency
			(01)		
C	Prison education	Institution 1	2 interviews	C1_01	The Oudernaarde
		(C1)	(01, 02)	C1_02	penitentiary
D	Non-formal adult education	Institution 1	2 interviews	D1_01	<i>Citizenne</i> - Vormingplus
		(D1)	(01, 02)	D1_02	Brussels
		Institution 2	3 interviews	D2_01	Syntra AB/Syntra
		(D2)	(01, 02, 03)	D2_02	Flanders
				D2_03	
E	Extra: Formal adult education	Institution 3	2 interviews	E1_01	Hogent
		(E1)	(01,02)	E1_02	
TOTAL			15 interviews		

**Table 1.2** Overview interviews (in order of date of interview)

	Type of Education	Organization (place)	Type of organization	Inter-viewee	Position interviewee	Date interview
1	Non-formal adult education	<i>Citizenne</i> – Vormingplus Brussels (Brussels)	Folk high school	D1_01	Senior manager	16th of April 2009
2	Non-formal adult education	<i>Citizenne</i> – Vormingplus Brussels (Brussels)	Folk high School	D1_02	Adult learning practioner	16th of April 2009
3	Government official	Department of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media	State Department	B1	Government state official – adjunct director of the Department of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media	22 of April 2009
4	Formal adult education	Centrum voor Basiseducatie – Leuven – Hageland (Leuven)	Centre for adult basic education	A_02	Teacher and project coordinator	23th of April 2009
5	Formal adult education	Centrum voor Basiseducatie – Leuven – Hageland (Leuven)	Centre for adult basic education	A1_01	Teacher and project coordinator	23th of April 2009
6	Formal adult education	Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs - Sociale	Centre for adult education	A2_01	Senior manager	28th of April 2009

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		School Heverlee (Heverlee)				
7	Formal adult education	Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs -Sociale School Heverlee (Heverlee)	Centre for adult education	A2_02	Teacher and coordinator of the Faculty of socio-cultural Work	28th of April 2009
8	Non-formal adult education	Syntra Antwerpen-Vlaams-Brabant – Campus Leuven (Haasrode)	Syntra – Flanders entrepreneurial training	D2_01	Coordinator of Syntra projects on diversity	4th of May 2009
9	Government official	The Agency for higher and adult education within the Ministry for Education and Training	State Agency	B2	Government state official – head of the agency	11th of May 2009

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**Table 1.2** Overview interviews (in order of date of interview) (continue)

	Type of Education	Organization (place)	Type of organization	Inter-viewee	Position interviewee	Date interview
10	Prison Education	The Oudenaarde penitentiary (Oudenaarde)	Prison	C1_01	Prison governor	14th of May 2009
11	Prison Education	The Oudenaarde penitentiary (Oudenaarde)	Prison	C1_02	Adult education coordinator	14th of May 2009
12	Non-formal adult education	Syntra Antwerpen-Vlaams-Brabant – Campus Leuven (Haasrode)	Syntra – entrepreneurial training	D2_02	Community leader/interpreter	18th of May 2009
13	Formal adult education	Hogent (Gent)	College of higher education	E1_01	Researcher	4th of June 2009
14	Formal adult education	Hogent (Gent)	College of higher education	E1_02	Teacher and member of the steering committee	4th of June 2009
15	Non-formal adult education	Syntra Antwerpen-Vlaams-Brabant – Campus Leuven (Haasrode)	Syntra – entrepreneurial training	D2_03	Course coordinator	6th of July 2009

## 2.2 Research method and analysis

In order to obtain information that can later be compared and contrasted (across cases, across countries), the technique of the structured interview was used. A structured interview is a verbal

questionnaire. In other words: the wording and sequence of the questions were determined in advance (prepared by the *Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College – Dublin* and refined through dialogue with all the research institutions involved in the LLL2010 project). This however, does not mean that all interviewees were asked the same questions. Different questionnaires were made for each educational sector. All questionnaires contained a mixture of questions on (A) factual information, (B) factual information about plans/intentions, (C) perceptions of leading organizational figures.

Some of the guidelines also contained some country specific questions arising directly from the results of subproject 3 (SP3) of the LLL2010 project. This was the case for the questionnaires for the formal educational institutions and the questionnaire for the government department officials. In this report we refer to those questions by indicating 'SP3-related question'.

Although interviews are often thought of as structured, semi-structured or informal (non-structured), these are not discrete categories and they often merge into each other during a conversation. This was also the case in this subproject. In some interviews not all questions of the questionnaire were to be asked, because for some issues there was already an adequate answer available on the institution's website or in other publicly available documents. This shows that the data used in this research project were not only collected during the interviews. When information was found in background documents, this did shorten the interview.

Although in a structured questionnaire all interview questions are to be interpreted as essential, there was a significant scope for the interviewee to give priority to those themes that emerged as inviting response in detail. Put differently: the interviewer did not artificially privilege some or just a few aspects in the questionnaire. The aspects perceived by the interviewee as most important were discussed in detail, other aspects not necessarily. In a way, the interviewee was given control over the interview although the pre-constructed interview guidelines and a template for models of (good) practice guided further detail. The interviews never emerged into free-flowing conversations.

Furthermore, there was still scope for the judgment of the interviewer as to which questions may be most important within a specific category or which may already have been answered by more elaborated previous answers. When two representatives from one institution were being interviewed, the answers from the first interview might also have influenced the emphasis within the second interview.

Of course not all of the interviewees could or would answer all of the questions asked. In the process of trying to ascertain gaps and lack of knowledge, it was important to assess all forms of

non-response. The non-response (specific questions not being answered or answers such as 'no', 'none' and 'I don't know') was assessed at the organizational level (i.e. across the two or three interviews related to one organization), rather than simply at the level of each interview individually, because it has to be recognized that institutional staff at different levels may have different interests as well as different levels of knowledge.

One of the comparative advantages of in-depth interviews (structured as well as semi-structured and non-structured), compared to a lot of other techniques of collecting data in social sciences, lies in the ability to get back to questions that are not answered initially and the ability to immediately validate answers by use of follow-up questions or by repeating or rephrasing questions in a new question. By doing so, we tried to receive a response for as much questions as possible. This was essential because the purpose of the interviews and this report in general was a directly comparative one. The follow-up questions were also used as a way to find out the reason for a particular answer/description/situation.

All interview data were analyzed using the software programme Nvivo 8.0. All content was coded according to a short code book. Although this code book was finished after the interviews were done, some outlining of aspects that needed to be coded was done before and during the field work.

The actual analysis of the interviews and background information as can be found in this report provides a context for the comparative analysis across countries and areas. The focus of this comparative analysis will be on transferable measures, instruments and (good) practices.

### **2.3 Understanding and definition of adult education**

Our understanding of adult education in this report follows these definitions:

- *Formal education*: education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous 'ladder' of education. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It leads to certification which leads to the next educational level.
- *Non Formal Education*: any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the definition of formal education above. Non-formal education takes place both within and outside educational institutions, for persons of all ages. Two key features of non-formal learning is that it does not directly involve certification or assessment, and its classes offer a potential bridge for the learner to the formal education system.

In addition to these two definitions, an internal glossary of terms was made. All relevant terms for this subproject were clarified in this glossary. We do not include the glossary in this report as it was meant to only serve as an internal document.

## **2.4 References**

Miles M.B. & Huberman A.M. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd edn.). London & Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.





## SECTION 2

### FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION

#### 1. Background information on formal adult education in Flanders

In this study we define formal adult education as all education provided in the system of schools, colleges and universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous 'ladder' of education. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It leads to the next educational level.

Using these criteria, there are several types of training programmes in Flanders that come under the common denominator of 'formal adult education'. They cover different educational forms of which some are rather vocationally oriented and others are not (Eurydice, 2006-2007). Every discipline has its own structure, target groups and status.

Let us have a brief look at the institutions that offer formal adult education.

*Centres for adult education (Centra voor volwassenenonderwijs)*

The centres for adult education offer different kinds of education:

- Continuing education or (by its old name), social advancement education (*Onderwijs voor Sociale Promotie – OSP*). This is a broad and varied type of education for all interested adults. It aims at imparting knowledge, improving skills and attitudes. Most of the issues covered by this form of education are oriented towards people's profession (business related courses, vocational courses), although a lot of them are also leisure-related or focused on functioning in society, or are both (like language courses). Social advancement education is the largest sector within the Flemish adult education sector (De Meyer, 2006). There are over 250 000 course participants each year. Before they can enrol, they must have finished full-time compulsory education.

Continuing education in centres for adult education is organized at the level of secondary education (33 areas of study), which is ISCED 3 level, or at the level of one-cycle higher education (8 categories), which is ISCED 5 level (OECD, 2004).

- Second chance education (*Tweedekansonderwijs – TKO*) is one specific subdivision of social advancement education. Although the name 'Second chance education' is no longer the official name of this type of education – it is now known as 'Courses of general formation' – it indicates well that this type of education enables adults to obtain a diploma of secondary education. In other words: adults get a 'second chance' to obtain the certificate they missed out on, by leaving compulsory education.

*Centres for adult basic education (Centra voor basiseducatie)*

The centres for adult basic education (ABE) focus on semi-skilled or unskilled adults that miss the key competences that are being taught in primary or secondary education. The ABE courses offer adults basic knowledge, key skills and attitudes to help them overcome their literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy problems in such a way so they can fully participate in society or enrol in other types of formal adult education. So besides a service that develops educational programmes, the centres for adult basic education also act as a step-up service in function of the progression towards other educational initiatives and towards work (Eurydice, 2006-2007).

Most participants in adult basic education are low-educated immigrants learning Dutch as their second language. Other courses offered within the centres are: Dutch as a mother tongue, mathematics, basic social skills, ICT, preparatory courses in French and English and preparatory literacy skills for Dutch as a second language. All courses are free of charge and courses lead to a certificate or a subcertificate.

*Supervised Individual Study (Begeleid Individueel studeren – BIS)*

Supervised Individual Study is a type of distance learning recognized by the Flemish authorities. Since the beginning of the millennium BIS has been partly integrated into part-time adult education. Today BIS online, which covers distance learning via the Internet, is no longer available. The 'correspondence' BIS programme (dispatched through the post) is still ongoing as a form of prison education and as a preparatory course for adults who are preparing an exam for the central state examination committee.

Other official types of distance learning, comparable to BIS, are Open Higher Education and the Open University. All these distance learning programmes offer a flexible way of individual study.

*Part-time artistic education (Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs – DKO)*

This time of education is attended by both adults and youngsters, which is why it is not always looked upon as a form of formal adult education. The general objective of this type of education is to meet the pupil's general artistic interest, to enable him or her to feed his or her artistic ambitions or to provide vocational training with opportunities for a professional career (Eurydice, 2006-2007). Therefore the part-time artistic education is structured along different hierarchical levels. To progress to the next year or grade, a student must have completed the previous year successfully.

*Dutch language houses (Huizen van het Nederlands)*

Since 2002 there are eight Dutch Language Houses. The Dutch language houses do not really organize educational activities or Dutch courses themselves. They are actually partnerships

between formal educational providers that offer Dutch as a second language, the Flemish Public Employment Service (the VDAB), the welcome offices and local authorities.

Finally, it is important to also mention the so-called Tertiary Short Cycle (*Hoger Beroepsonderwijs – HBO*). This ‘new’ type of education bridges secondary education and higher education. It includes vocationally-oriented training programmes organized at higher-education level which do not lead to a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree. Together with evening education organized by university colleges and universities, this can also be added to the list of formal adult education institutions (Eurydice 2006-2007). Yet, when the Flemish Department for Education and Training refers to formal adult education, it usually refers to those first three types of provision (offered by centres for adult education, centres for adult basic education and distance learning (BIS in particular).

#### *National policy documents on the access of adults to formal adult education*

For all of the types of formal education mentioned above we list the core legislation:

- adult education: Decree dd. 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007;
- adult basic education: Decree dd. 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007;
- part-time artistic education: Decree dd. 16<sup>th</sup> May 1999.

A more comprehensive overview can be found on: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/edulex>. Detailed information on the legal framework is to be found in the Eurydice publications on Belgium: <http://www.eurydice.org>.

To get specific quantitative data and statistics on participation in formal adult education in Flanders, see: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/publicatie/eDocs/pdf/247.pdf>.

#### *References*

De Meyer I. (2006), *OECD/CERI-study: What works in innovation in education. Improving teaching and learning for adults with basic skills needs through formative assessment. Background report: Belgium – Flanders*. Universiteit Gent – Education Department: Gent.

OECD (2004), *Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications: The definition and classification of educational programmes: the practical implementation of ISCED*. OECD Publishing: Paris.

#### *Additional information*

- <http://www.eurydice.org>
- [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/structures/041\\_BN\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/structures/041_BN_EN.pdf) (Eurydice 2008 Edition)

## 2. Case 1: Open School – Centre for adult basic education Leuven - Hageland

### 2.1 Background information

#### *Features of the institution/information on the interviewees*

- *Type of education:* formal adult education
- *Type of institution:* centre for adult basic education
- *Name of the institution:* Open School – Centre for Adult Basic Education Leuven – Hageland (Open school - Centrum voor basiseducatie Leuven –Hageland)
- *Interviewee 1:* teacher and project coordinator (A1\_01)
- *Interviewee 2:* teacher and project coordinator (A1\_02)

The 'Open School - Centre for Adult Basic Education Leuven – Hageland' (*Open school - Centrum voor basiseducatie Leuven –Hageland*) is one of the thirteen official centers for adult basic education in Flanders. The Open School headquarters are based in the province of Flemish Brabant, which is an area in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium that completely surrounds the Brussels-Capital region.

#### *Funding sources of the organization*

Open School is a non-profit organization that receives financial support from the Flemish government (the Flemish Ministry of Training and Education). The state funding fluctuates according to the numbers of classes and participants per year. For some projects Open School uses additional non-standard public funding sources (e.g. ESF funding, funding by the Flemish City Fund (*Stedenfonds*), Province of Flemish Brabant, etc.).

If it was not for that supplementary financial support, adult education institutions would not be able to give access to some disadvantaged groups in the same way and to the same extent, one interviewee argues:

*“Devoting a great deal of attention to some disadvantaged groups is, put in financial terms, not a very interesting option for an adult education institution. Slow-learning at-risk groups and disadvantaged groups play no visible role in society and often bring along some problems, such as lack of motivation, money problems and other personal issues. Above all, the fact that they are not used to take classes makes them harder to work with and requires the application of a different didactic approach.” (A1\_02 – SP3 related question)*

The interviewee concludes that it is therefore important that the attention for specific disadvantaged groups is embedded in the mission and vision of the organization (A1\_02 – SP3 related question).

*Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

Like all other centers for adult basic education (ABE) Open School aims at adults in need of essential basic skills in one or several fields of study.<sup>1</sup> The Open School target groups are not necessarily the unschooled adults or the poorly and least educated adults. Even adults that completed formal education at the level of ISCED 4 in some cases need to upgrade their essential basic skills (A1\_02).

Open School welcomes about 3 000 adult learners a year. About fifty percent of them are immigrants that sign up for an ABE course to learn Dutch as a second language (L2-learners).

Most of the courses organized by Open School are open to everyone that is interested. Sometimes a course is only accessible for members of a specific target group. These tailor-made courses are mostly organized in partnership with other organizations (see below: section outreach).

*Access strategies*

To avoid financial barriers hindering the access to adult basic education, access to the courses is completely free. Sometimes a small contribution is asked to pay for books, copies, etc.

The organization's policy on access is expressed at two different levels.

The first level implies all the awareness-raising aspects of access to education. The recruitment of new learners and the promotion of access is essentially the responsibility of all staff members, but one employee in particular has the task of overseeing and coordinating the promotion actions (running information stands, lending out notice boards, message boards and poster frames, organizing demonstration activities, etc.)

The second level refers to elements like motivating, detecting learning needs, etc. once an adult has agreed to enroll for a course. The main responsibility for this rests with the executive managers of the organization's sub-teams, but also with the individual teachers.

**2.2 The access of adults to formal adult education***Institutional strategies, structures and institutional climate*

Open school uses two different strategies to open the access to formal adult basic education.

First of all, by offering training courses the organization encourages and supports the upgrading of basic and life skills and competencies in general. Secondly, the organization makes a special effort in attracting adults that would normally never get involved in adult basic education. These

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<sup>1</sup> The fields of study are: Dutch as a mother tongue, Dutch as a second language, Literacy skills for Dutch as a second language, Social studies, Arithmetic and mathematics, Information and communication technology, preparatory courses in French or English.

are the so-called ‘hard-to-reach groups’ (A1\_02). Sometimes activities are directed towards one or two of those groups (see model of practice).

An example of such a hard-to-reach group is the group of low-literate adults with Dutch as their first language.

*“Motivating adults to enroll for NT1 courses [Dutch literacy classes for native speakers] is not easy. It is not immediately rewarding. Learning how to improve your reading and writing skills is a very slow process.” (A1\_01)*

Open School used to have a written strategic plan regarding specific targets and benchmarks in attracting specific disadvantaged or underrepresented groups. Today, this plan needs an update. One interviewee (A1\_02) mentions the idea of a new strategic plan on an organizational level, but goes on to say that due to the recent reforms in formal adult education in Flanders, Open School did not have the opportunity to work on an update of that plan yet.

#### *Outreach*

It is a common practice for centers for adult basic education to invest in outreach activities.

*“The centers for adult basic education in the Flemish Community have a different approach in terms of outreach. Some provide a broad outreach to enterprises, small, medium-sized and large ones, others establish a close cooperation with cooperatives, non-governmental organizations and charities, and others have a tradition in working together with city services such as the OCMW – the public centre for social welfare.” (A1\_02)*

Open School has a tradition in reaching out to other non-profit organizations, associations and communities (e.g. organising courses in community centres).

According to the interviewees, it is important – in any outreach project – to make sure that the theme and content of courses are linked to what the target group is really interested in: health, food, budgeting and money, etc. Another key aspect is the use of the key biographic moments and lived experiences of the participants in the learning process.

#### *Opportunities for social interaction to promote social networks*

In order to reach new potential learners in local communities, Open School also adopted an open door policy. People living nearby can always drop by. A few other institutions can also book a classroom, although - as one interviewee (A1\_02) points out - the building is in fact nearly permanently overbooked.

Every now and then there are school or community group visits being organized to the ABE campus (for instance, for the new participants of *Stappen Vooruit*, see below). Open School however does organize group visits for intermediate institutions - especially the ones concerning

work, public and community services – and institutions in general that might broaden the access to ABE. These organizations are regularly brought together for the purpose of presenting useful information on Open School and ABE in general.

#### *Transition programmes and admission policies*

As noted earlier, nearly all courses are free of charge. Every person having left compulsory education is free to enroll. In some specific cases, according to governmental regulation, young adults that are still in secondary education are allowed admission to the ABE courses too.

Remedial support is offered using an open learning method, but in general teachers try to let every participant learn according to their own planning and at their own speed.

#### *Recognition of prior learning*

Open School is an official and recognized centre for formal adult basic education and is therefore entitled by the Flemish authorities to hand out official certificates. When a participant meets the learning objectives of a specific module (as established by the Flemish authorities) he or she is rewarded with a modular certificate.

During the intake procedure (a new participant entering a programme for the first time) Open School explicitly takes into account the non-formal learning experiences and the work experiences of the participant, not just the certificates and diplomas.

*“We always screen and assess the competencies and knowledge people have. This is done by means of a test and an intake interview. Our centre is free in organising these the way it wants. The main goal of the recognition of prior learning experiences is to place the participant in the appropriate level or program for which he or she is properly credentialed.”*

*(A1\_02)*

One of the factors driving the implementation of the recognition of prior formal and non-formal learning is helping the participants meet the standard requirements of the module and, eventually, help them to get a standardized certificate. This is the sectoral effect of the recognition of prior learning. One interviewed tutor acknowledges assessing and validating competencies in ABE has less impact in terms of the civil society.

*“For the jobs most adult basic education students work in, such as cleaning jobs and low-paid assembly line jobs, general competencies like literacy skills and other basic skills are usually not obligatory or expected. And for those being unemployed specific technical competencies are of more importance. However, when learning technical competencies, some basic skills - learning how to learn, problem-solving skills, etc. - are at stake too. That is why embedding literacy and numeracy into vocational programmes could be a win-win-*

*situation in case equal attention is devoted to both. It improves the literacy and numeracy skills of the students but also the technical skills they need to master for their job or their future job.” (A1\_02)*

#### *Support services*

All educational support is in the hands of the tutors. Together with the coordinator of the specific programme, they also offer social and emotional support if needed.

*“I’ll give you an example of the support we offer. During breaks and after class, low-literate adults get the chance to ask the tutor information on official letters they received but do not understand and for support when facing literacy problems in their own private sphere. In order to give this support, tutors must have an attitude of full accountability and an open and solution-focused mentality. Maintaining a “businesslike” mentality is out of the question.” (A1\_01)*

In case of other problems, such as psycho-social problems, issues concerning poverty, etc. the tutors and programme coordinators actively refer to other organizations and services.

#### *Distance learning*

Distance learning approaches and technologies are not widely used in ABE in Belgium. Open learning approaches with the participants not being physically ‘on site’ but outside the class room are especially difficult to implement when learners need a lot of guidance and direct support. However, one interviewee (A1\_02) acknowledges that online learning is perhaps the way of the future in ABE.

*“We recently started a project that implies distance learning. For that project we collaborate with another company that is specialized in the optimization of human relations in organizations, using scientific-based tools and methods for that. The project will focus on online learning among disadvantaged groups.” (A1\_02)*

### **2.3 Models of practice**

#### **A step forward (stappen vooruit)**

##### *Objectives of practice*

‘A step forward’ is the name of a project that was initiated by Open School in collaboration with several other partners from all over the province. The closest partners are social economy enterprises. Others are, for instance, the OCMW (the public centre for social welfare) and VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service).



‘A step forward’ started first as an ESF project (Stappen Vooruit) (2004-2005) and was prolonged in the ESF project under the name ‘Mapping basic skills’ (*Basiscompetenties in Kaart – BiK*) but it is still running today (2008-2009) independent of ESF funding.

Here are the main objectives of the practice:

- the project fulfills a warning function for people in need of basic skills. It raises awareness, advises the target group members and refers them to an appropriate level of adult education;
- the project aims at achieving a barrier-free access to adult basic education courses for specific target groups;
- the project implements a stepwise approach for the intake of new participants into the regular ABE courses;
- through screening and assessment the project shows the participants their learning potential;
- the partnerships (with enterprises, VDAB, etc.) the project is based on, assure that the competencies learned are well-adjusted to the workplace requirements.

#### *Target groups and background of this model*

The ‘A step forward’ programme gives a privileged access to groups of:

- unemployed adults receiving specialist assistance in finding a regular job or having a pathway to work negotiated for them;
- adults carrying out paid employment duties in a sheltered environment.

Both groups would not easily sign up for an adult basic education course on their own initiative.

As a consequence these two groups are currently underrepresented in adult basic education.

It is important to indicate that the project explicitly, but not solely, focuses on low-literate adults having Dutch as their mother tongue. Since the participation of L1-learners in ABE is stagnating, this group as a whole is in fact underrepresented.

By giving these two target groups a privileged access to an ABE course and (in case of employees) by giving them the opportunity to do so during paid working hours, the project actually wants to help adults overcome some of the most important barriers to education.

First of all, the priority enrolment avoids that adults end up on a waiting list. Especially for the IT courses, a lot of people would normally be on a waiting list.

Secondly, the fact that participation (in case of the employed target group) is directly suggested

by the employer<sup>2</sup> might make it easier for the participants to overcome attitudinal barriers like low motivation.

Thirdly, being able to participate during regular working hours helps adults to tackle barriers that arise from the lack of time to participate.

Both interviewees realise that these elements are especially important at the moment of entering the programme, but do not necessarily take away a negative attitude towards education. That is why during the two sessions of the project the tutors give the participants information on the adult basic education system, make them familiar with the methods, course content and objectives and carefully explain the benefits of participation. These benefits are symbolised by the project title 'A Step forward'. At this stage, the personal contacts between participants and tutors are very important.

During the second phase of the programme the participants' literacy and basic skills are being screened and an intake interview takes place. The screening takes place by means of a test (announced as "an exercise" rather than as "a test"). The test starts off with an easy level and gets progressively harder. It includes various break-off points (for terminating the test in case of consecutive failure) and is made as functional and real-life as possible.

The assessment results are written down in a portfolio and based upon those results and upon the interview an individualised learning path is defined. After that the participants attend different courses depending on the outcome of the tests. These courses include different themes such as: planning and organising, social studies, Dutch, literacy skills, arithmetic and mathematics, etc. Most of the participants attend the courses on 'Planning and organising on the shop floor' and 'Communication on the shop floor', these are particularly aimed at the target group.

From that point on (using the constructed learning path) the project participants slowly become

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<sup>2</sup> For some participants it is not just 'suggested' but forcefully suggested or prescribed. This is the case for the WEP employees taking part in the project. WEP is a work experience programme that offers work experience to low educated and unskilled long-term unemployed adults. This work experience programme takes place outside the commercial sector in 'social work places' and non governmental organisations. WEP is a transition-work-scheme for at-risk groups. It is part of a remedial or curative approach to unemployment.

The fact that WEP employees have to participate in the 'A step forward' programme is part of an arrangement that is made by Open School and the WEP employers. Their enrolment thus becomes part of a subsidized work-experience contract the WEP employees and employers conclude. The 'A step forward' project is free of charge but since the employees attend the classes during working hours, they are actually being paid for their participation.

part of a regular ABE course group.

*“Most project participants will not be part of the regular course groups right away. This will happen by taking a step-by-step approach. This is done purposely: the target groups need a somewhat different approach than the “regular learners” in adult basic education. After a few sessions the target group members will attend the regular adult basic education courses and will be added to the other course groups. This decision is always made in consultation with the employer.” (A1\_01)*

#### *History/Funding sources*

From the very start, the project was co funded by ESF Agency.<sup>3</sup> Funding the project was one of the most difficult aspects of getting it started.

*“The start of this project was not smooth sailing all the way (...). Funding the project and finding coordinators was not easy.” (A1\_01)*

#### *Number of participants*

Every month 15 new participants enroll for the programme. From September 2009 to June 2009 exactly 160 adults joined the *Stappen Vooruit* project. Of the 395 adults who have joined the project up to now, 176 of them are still participating in a regular ABE course.

#### *Location*

The ‘A step forward’ programme takes place in the building of Open School Leuven (12 times a year) and in the Hageland region close to Leuven (6 times a year). According to the interviewees it is important that it is not offered on the shop-floor.

#### *Perceived strengths*

Obviously the project reaches out to target groups that would otherwise never participate spontaneously in adult education (A1\_01). One of the key success factors, according to one of the interviewees, is the assessment during the second phase of the project.

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<sup>3</sup> “The ESF Agency Flanders is responsible for managing the European Social Fund (ESF) in Flanders, (...). It manages the Flemish ESF programme, guides project promoters and disseminates information on various aspects of the European Social Fund. It offers a network for Flemish and European labour market partners and its mission is to support the implementation and innovation of Flemish labour market policy as well as to contribute to implementing the Flemish Reform Programme in the framework of a revised Lisbon strategy.” (<http://www.esf-agentschap.be>)

*“The fact that formal educational aspects like testing and assessment are included actually motivates participants. It points out that participation in the project is not without commitment but also that they can learn in a “formal way” while being in a setting that is unlike school (...) The results of the tests are being shared with and discussed with all partners in the project.” (A1\_01)*

#### *Perceived weaknesses*

One interviewee indicates one must always stay aware of the fact that the project target groups differ from the groups of adults that voluntarily enrol for a course in the centre.

*“The step-by-step intake of new adult participants is not something that is to be taken for granted. Sometimes the project fails in fulfilling this expectation.” (A1\_02)*

Another perceived weakness lies within the fact that the project can do little about the participants' inner drive. Because employees get paid for their attendance, they usually are externally motivated. But, even so, the project organizers sometimes come to the conclusion that workers with a low internal motivation prefer working over learning. The project also has little impact on some reasons for drop-out.

*“In case an employee loses his job, finds another employer, becomes imprisoned, etc. he or she is most likely to stop participating in the programme. But even then there is a silver lining: those adults received an introduction to adult basic education practice (...) they might consider participating again later on in their lives. They also got a first hand experience that lifelong learning can be fun.” (A1\_01)*

#### *Priority needs for expansion of the model/service*

Other centers for adult basic education have shown interest in the project. So far it is only implemented in one region in Flanders.

#### *Methods of feedback, evaluation*

Open School monitors how many project participants actually continue participating in the regular ABE classes.

#### *Perception regarding the impact of the recession on this model*

According to both interviewees the recession does not pose genuine problems to the project or to ABE in general. As a matter of fact there is no negative impact noticeable yet, they state. To

the contrary, up to now the recession provided a positive influence on the adult basic education field. This might be an indirect impact of the crisis, one interviewee explains.

*“A recession leading up to more unemployment usually has a positive effect on, for instance, social economy. The social economy sector has a strong affiliation with adult basic education. It is one of the most important partners in this project. So indirectly, the recession has the same impact on this project.” (A1\_02)*

## 2.4 References

The Open School website and the regulations of the organization:

<http://www.cbeleuven.be/Centrumreglement%20september%202008.doc>

## 3. Case 2: Sociale School Heverlee – Centre for adult education

### 3.1 Background information

*Features of the institution/information on the interviewees*

- *Type of education:* formal adult education;
- *Type of institution:* centre for adult education;
- *Name of the institution:* ‘Social School Heverlee - Centre for adult education’ (Sociale school Heverlee vzw – centrum voor volwassenenonderwijs SSH-CVO) (A2);
- *Interviewee 1:* senior manager (A2\_01);
- *Interviewee 2:* teacher and coordinator of the faculty for sociocultural studies (A2\_02).

#### Model of good practice

This model of practice covers the institution SSH-CVO as a whole. The institution has several successful practices in widening access to adult education for underrepresented groups. We refer to several of these practices in this case description but without describing them separately.

#### *History/background of this model*

SSH-CVO is an official centre for adult education, recognized by the Flemish public authorities. The centre is rooted in the Christian Labour Movement ACW (*Algemeen Christelijk Werknemersverbond* – ACW), which is a federation of Christian employees’ organizations.

Today, the SSH-CVO is embedded in the college for higher education, Social School Heverlee – KHLeuven - Department of social work Heverlee (*Sociale School Heverlee – Katholieke Hogeschool Leuven*). The centre for adult education SSH-CVO and the college for higher education have a complementary course list: the first offers courses that lead to a degree in post-secondary education (*een graduaatopleiding*) (also called social advancement education or Associates

Degree), while the latter comprises professional and academic education leading to a bachelor's diploma or a master's diploma.

#### *Objectives of practice*

The SSH-CVO offers flexible study programmes in the field of social work. All programmes lead to a modular certificate (*deelcertificaat*), a certificate (*certificaat*) or diploma.

Reaching out to the hardest-to-reach adults is one of the major concerns of the SSH-CVO.

*“Issues like emancipation, widening participation, enhancing learning opportunities and fighting inequity are included in the institution’s mission and vision. Emancipating people through education is of vital importance to us” (A2\_01)*

#### *Number of participants*

At the moment of the interviews (28<sup>th</sup> of April 2009) 721 adult learners participate in one or more courses. 381 of them aim at getting a certificate or diploma; the others participate in order to get a modular certificate. Of those 381 students, most are female (267) and are employed (222). 82 students (of the 381) got an exemption from or reduction of the tuition fee (see below).

The average age of all participants is 31 years. The average age of adults taking a course on special or remedial education (*orthopedagogiek*) is 26. Those opting for a course on trade union work (*syndicaal werk*) have an average age of 36.

Most of the students combine their studies with family life.

#### *Location*

The SSH-CVO is located in Heverlee near the city of Leuven. Leuven is the capital of the province of Flemish Brabant in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

#### *Funding sources of the organization/Funding sources of the practices*

The SSH-CVO receives direct state funds from the Flemish Community. These funds are budgeted according to the Flemish Decree on Adult Education that was approved by the Flemish Parliament in the year 2007. To qualify for funding, the SSH-CVO must – like all other centers for adult education – adopt the structure (including modular education and learning pathways), learning plans, etc. that are laid down in the decree.

#### *Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

In the year 2008 a study was made on the SSH-CVO participants (Provoost, 2008). The study showed that the highest diploma obtained by most students (63.5%) that sign up for a course is a diploma of higher secondary education. Still 15.9% of the participants only hold a diploma of lower secondary education, an elementary education certificate or no diploma or certificate at all.

According to the senior manager (A2\_01) the SSH-CVO attracts a diverse participant population:

1. Adults that failed to complete secondary education. *"They are unqualified and they usually have known a short and very unusual educational path"* (A2\_01).
2. Skilled adults working in the field of societal work, socio-cultural work, etc. that do not have the (right) certificate to have good promotion prospects. This group also includes adults contemplating a change of career. In general, these are people *"looking for meaning"* (A2\_02): they have completed compulsory education or a higher study at an earlier stage but enter or re-enter adult education because their position or the job that they are doing is not fulfilling to them and they want to pursue a new area of expertise.
3. People with a learning style that does not fit the normal or traditional class room setting (e.g. a hierarchical relationship with the teacher exercising the authority of his position over the learners, frontal teaching, deductive ways of learning, etc.). Although those adults might have rather ambiguous feelings about their past schooling they still demonstrate a high interest in learning.

Finally, we should also mention a small population of adults with a (chronic) illness.

The centre for adult education deliberately promotes the recruitment of this diverse participant population, by using inductive teaching and learning methods, by focusing on experiential or experience-oriented learning, etc. At the same time, the interviewees emphasize the importance of teaching theoretical issues.

#### *Target groups*

There are several groups of potential learners that are underrepresented in the SSH-CVO participation statistics. The interviewees give an overview of the most important underrepresented target groups.

One important group consists of adults with a different country of origin (e.g. immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented adults) that do not have Dutch as their first or second language. The institution has over twenty years of experience in working with this target group. The centre does reach these adults although not in all fields of study to the same extent. In the courses on socio-cultural work and societal work, male immigrants (especially Turkish, Moroccan and Greek adults) are not underrepresented. Immigrant women are however much harder to recruit because it forces them to be 'untraditional' in their gender role.

*"Care, social work and welfare are mainly considered family matters in Moroccan and Turkish culture. It is mostly managed by women. But the fully professionalised system of care and health care is not only in the hands of women"* (A2\_01).

Unemployed adults and adults who receive material help from the Public Service for Social Work (*Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn - OCMW*) are another important target group. Slow learning adults and learners for whom a traditional learning context might not be appropriate even though they have a high IQ are an underrepresented group as well. *“This group of adults wants to make meaning from direct experience”* (A2\_02). Today, this group consists of 10 percent of the participating population of SSH-CVO.

Besides those groups, there are several other types of people at risk of exclusion the SSH-CVO encourages to enrol but does not succeed in yet, at least not in a satisfactory way: adults with a physical disability, with a psycho-emotional disorder, ex-addicts, etc. Poor people are mentioned in the interviews as well.

*“Poor people have the feeling they belong to a different class, a different culture. They have a different way of handling written and printed information. It is hard to acculturate those people into a culture of learning that we are used to. They have a different language, they learn in different ways, etc. I would call it “survival learning” – learning the things one needs in order to survive well”* (A2\_01).

#### *Access strategies*

The SSH-CVO uses several pre-entry access strategies.

One of the most important strategies the centre for adult education concentrates on is the cooperation with other organizations. The programme on socio-cultural work, for instance, takes on school-based apprenticeships or traineeships for students. *“Formal jobs in non-formal businesses”* the senior manager calls them (A2\_01). The organizations that employ apprentices and trainees are brought together by the SSH-CVO on a regular basis. These organizations also help to attract new potential adult learners. By collaborating with them, the SSH-CVO is in other words able to network in the field of work.

The SSH-CVO also uses printed press (programme brochure, local newspaper, flyers, adverts, documents, etc.) and online tools (such as a website) to increase the access to their educational provision. Although this type of advertisement reaches most people, a recent evaluation research by the SSH-CVO has shown the effects of this strategy are rather minimal.

A lot of the promotion to open access for adults at risk is done through word-of-mouth-advertisement. According to both interviewees this is by far the most effective form of widening access. The organization tries to cultivate this type of advertisement through different strategies:

- community leaders and key figures in a community can take on the role of ‘key influencers’.
- The SSH-CVO tries to give them incentives to do so;



- participants and former participants are just as important in the process of widening access. They tell others about their learning experiences or someone in their community will hear about the courses, etc.

Both strategies take limited budget but have unlimited potential.

The support from the tutors and coordinators is also an important element in the process of opening access. The open-door policy they adopt, the time they spend on intake-interviews, etc. are crucial at the point and shortly after the point of entry. Those elements can also be considered pre-entry strategies since the ‘informal’ way they handle potential students seems to have positively impacted on the enrolment of new individuals and groups. Informal support is however very time-consuming for the teachers and coordinators. The senior manager states that the staff members spend 18.86% of their time on coaching, supporting, mentoring, and so on.

### 3.2 The access of adults to formal adult education

*Course content, institutional strategies, structures and review processes*

The SSH-CVO offers five types of courses:

- social work directed towards psychosocial guidance (*maatschappelijk werk*);
- sociocultural studies (*sociaal-cultureel werk*);
- human resources management (*personeelswerk*);
- trade union work (*syndicaal werk*);
- special or remedial education (*orthopedagogiek*).

The SSH-CVO offers **full time education**, mostly during working hours. Some courses are scheduled on Saturdays. This is not the case for the courses on socio-cultural work. The teacher (A2\_02) explains that a lot of women, natives as well as migrants, take on these courses and for them attending on a Saturday is usually harder because they have to look after their children then.

All courses are structured in a **modular** way. All formal adult education offered by recognized centers for adult education will become fully modularized by the year 2012.

Organizing adult education in a modular fashion has some advantages, one interviewee says.

*“The modular system is flexible and “a la carte”. You can attend the modules you are interested in, as many as you want (...) you can even enroll for just one course if you want to do so. (...) It is an interesting structure that attracts participants from all over Flanders” (A2\_02).*

The groups the SSH-CVO works with are rather **small groups** compared to other institutions in formal adult education, the senior manager states (A2\_01). The maximum amount of participants is no more than thirty people. The centre uses this maximum on purpose because a limited group size positively impacts the informal ties between participants.

Like all other subsidized CVOs, the centre for adult education SSH-CVO is financed by the state on the basis of course-participant numbers. The SSH-CVO is obliged to fulfill at least 120 000 course-participant-hours<sup>4</sup> (*Iesurencursist*) on a yearly basis, which it has accomplished already for five years now. A standard that takes into account the number of teaching periods and the number of course participants however increases the pressure to enlarge the course groups, the interviewees say.

*“We do not want to have group sizes that are not pedagogically justified – for instance over thirty people in one class room. Bigger groups make it more difficult to create a comfortable learning climate with a practice-based orientation and a participative and experiential approach” (A2\_01).*

According to the senior manager (A2\_01), there are **few state initiatives** targeted towards the official centers for adult education to improve the access of underrepresented groups. She claims the first concern of the Flemish government is the quantity of participation rather than reaching out to those coming from a disadvantaged background such as a deprived or marginalized socio-economic background ( due to family circumstances, ethnic status, and so on).

As a consequence, the subsidizing authorities do not use points of reference or benchmarks when it comes to reaching new target groups.

#### *Institutional climate/tutors*

As stated earlier, the teachers and coordinators of each department play a pivotal role in supporting students and potential students. They make sure they are easily approachable and their assistance is easily accessible.

The interviewees say it is essential for the tutors to have prior teaching experience in teaching diverse and multicultural groups and for the coordinators to have experience in handling the influx of learners from all around the world.

*“Teaching a mixture of ages, nationalities, abilities, etc. in one class group is not an easy thing to do. It can generate tension and disputes, for instance, between asylum seekers and*

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<sup>4</sup> The course-participant-hours (*Iesurencursist*) are the amount of teaching periods in a module (in terms of hours) multiplied by the quantity of regular attending students.

*refugees and poor Flemish people. (...) But mostly, the results of different groups working together are astonishing” (A2\_02).*

*“It is also important to have migrant teachers in the team of teachers. This way minority groups will see themselves reflected in the staff and the institution as a whole” (A2\_02).*

This also explains why so few colleges for higher education and universities have a policy on working with vulnerable groups, the interviewed senior manager states. Working with those groups means a teacher has a different position in the class. It will also involve a higher level of interactivity, because those groups pose different questions, dare to criticize the teacher, need more support, have specific demands about when preparing and taking exams, etc. (A2\_01, SP3-related question)

#### *Transition programmes and remedial classes*

The fact that there is no real linear structure but a modular one enables every adult learner to learn at his own speed and level. This makes a preparatory programme, a transition programme, a remedial class or extra support for students in (the transition between) different educational levels unnecessary.

Students that graduated from the SSH-CVO can obtain a bachelor’s degree in Social work and Welfare studies via a bridging programme comprising 45 study points (in the future, this will be 60 study points).

#### *Admission policies*

Before participants enter their first module, those who do not have a diploma of higher secondary education have to pass an **admission test**. This is a test to measure literacy achievement, language levels and capacity for abstraction. The test does not aim at excluding people with poor literacy skills, but wants to help adults to brush up their skills in order to be able to complete a course successfully.

For all participants a **regular attendance** is compulsory throughout the course period. A participant is only allowed to miss no more than one out of six lessons. Participants who are often absent (without a valid excuse or prior permission) cannot take the exam.

Enrolling for a course (a module or an entire course) at SSH-CVO is not for free. During the school year 2008-2009, course participants had to pay a maximum of 1 euro for each teaching period. There is however a **registration-fee exemption** included in the Decree on Adult Education of 2007 (De Vries, 2008).

The following disadvantaged groups are fully exempt from course fees:

- persons who take on a course in ‘general education’ (second chance education);

- persons who qualify for a subsistence income;
- asylum-seekers and certain other categories of non-nationals;
- people who have signed a naturalisation contract or people who have obtained a naturalisation certificate;
- detainees residing in Belgian penitentiaries;
- job-seekers in receipt of a job-seeker's allowance or unemployment benefits who register for a pathway-to-work programme recognized by VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service);
- unemployed, compulsory registered job-seekers who are not yet entitled to a job-seeker's allowance;
- people in part-time or full-time compulsory education.

The tuition fee for courses Dutch as a second language is 0.50 euro for each teaching period.

Reduced registration fees of 0.25 euro apply to:

- certain categories of disabled persons;
- job-seekers in receipt of a job-seeker's allowance or unemployment benefits who register for a pathway-to-work programme other than one recognized by VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service);
- course participants who first followed a course of at least 120 teaching periods at a centre for adult basic education for a period of 2 years.

Employees are entitled to pay half of their registration fees in *opleidingscheques* (training vouchers).<sup>5</sup>

All of this makes the tuition fees hardly ever a real barrier, the senior manager says (A2\_01):

*"The participants that are not able to pay the tuition fee right away have the chance to spread out payments" (A2\_01).*

#### *Recognition of prior learning*

Apart from the admission test, the SSH-CVO organizes at least one examination at the end of each module. Adults passing those exams get a modular certificate. Such a modular certificate ratifies one course module. A certificate ratifies an entire course.

The SSH-CVO pays attention to the pre-entry learning of participants.

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<sup>5</sup> The *opleidingscheques* are, in a dual system with the *ondernemerschapsportefeuille* (Portfolio for Enterprises – a subsidies scheme for small and mid-size Flemish companies), a cost reducing measure for employees only that covers some of the training costs, at least when the training is offered by a certified training centre. The *opleidingscheques* are an initiative of the Flemish Government to stimulate lifelong and life wide learning.

*“We have some experience in the recognition and validation of prior learning. The portfolio technique is used by participants to proof prior learning and work experiences. This is followed by an assessment. For instance, someone that worked as an editor for a journal showed this in his portfolio. This has lead to the exemption of the module on written communication. (...) Concerning the recognition and validation of prior learning we still miss a real framework. Such a framework would be of surplus value. There is no real evolution in the recognition of prior learning as far as I can see (...) we must also bear in mind that not everybody has prior learning outcomes that can be validated” (A2\_02).*

### Support

The SSH-CVO offers all kinds of support to the participants, especially to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is mainly the responsibility of the teachers.

*“All of the teachers are very patient and really make an effort. They want to make sure all students pass their exams and complete their study successfully. (...) they are trained to think: what does this student need here and now?” (A2\_02)*

First of all the teachers perform **psycho-emotional and psycho-social coaching** where and when necessary. When social or emotional problems turn out to be long-term ones, the teachers and coordinators refer the adults to other specialized organizations.

Many teachers are specialists in:

- helping students to overcome fear of failure;
- teaching them to plan their learning process;
- helping them how to learn and develop other meta-cognitive skills;

These things are taught best through individual consultation but also through group sessions. Those group sessions are mainly geared towards the group of adult learners that did not complete secondary education successfully. The SSH-CVO actually organizes the group sessions as a module and students can get credits for it. This makes the sessions less stigmatizing for those learners in need of coaching and it enhances their motivation.

The teachers also offer career support. Both interviewees indicate the teachers receive fewer questions for support in career development than a few years ago.

*“Students get insight in the field of work quite fast (...) they are familiar with the field through apprenticeships, through the experiences they get from tutors, etc. Some students are being recruited during their apprenticeship” (A2\_02).*

The SSH-CVO has neither a separate career support service nor an academic or study advice service. Both interviewees doubt if such services are real facilitators because they are not barrier-

free. The secretarial office is usually a place that is easy accessible, so a lot of support and problem solving is done there (A2\_02).

#### *Distance learning*

Distance learning (in this case e-learning) is embedded in most of the course programmes. Distance learning is, by both interviewees, looked at as a possible advantage in the learning process. In the interviewees' perception, because of didactic reasons, an adult education institution should not miss the opportunity to use new technologies.

One interviewee considers the concept of e-learning to be closely linked with the notion of experiential learning and thinks it is particularly effective:

*"We exploit the potential of e-learning as much as possible. The Internet creates a unique learning environment and offers tools for participative and experiential learning. Let me give you an example. Two students have to make a paper. A message board or online discussion site can be used by the students to react on each others writings. They can link what the other student wrote with their own experiences and interests. (...) Of course this demands an alternative didactic approach. Besides that, the participants must be familiar with IT and the Internet. It takes certain autonomy of the learner".*

Both interviewees agree that even though e-learning methods have some advantages, for instance re-aligning the life/work/education balance, they are not equally applicable among at-risk learners.

#### *Impact of the recession on this model*

Caused by the recession, there are in fact less financial resources for the same amount of work. The number of enrollments has not decreased (or increased) though. The risk of all direct funding sources drying up is considered very small.

#### *Priority needs for expansion of the model/service*

Both interviewees indicate that institutions for formal adult education should pay more attention to underrepresented groups. However, our research (SP3) shows that not many institutions for adult education in Flanders make an effort for these groups:

*"It must be reflected in the didactics. One must for instance work with the concrete life-worlds of the students. This is a matter of taking your time as a teacher, which makes it difficult to achieve the goals stated by the institution. Quality management, qualification systems, etc. easily take the focus away from the efforts an institution can and must make for those groups" (A2\_02, SP3-related question).*

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## 4. Case 3: Hogent – University College Ghent

### 4.1 Background information

*Features of the institution/information on the interviewees*

- *Type of education*: formal adult education;
- *Type of institution*: college for higher education;
- *Name of the institution*: Hogent – University College Ghent (Hogent – Hogeschool Gent);
- *Interviewee 1*: researcher and project manager ‘Language project’ (E1\_01);
- *Interviewee 2*: teacher at the faculty of Social Work and Welfare studies (E1\_02).

Today, there are 22 colleges for higher education in Flanders. These colleges are, all together, publicly funded for roughly 670 million euro (all non-university tertiary education). The share of all tertiary education in the overall education budget of the Flemish community was 16.85% in the year 2007 (Flemish Community, 2007).

Hogent was established in 1995. It is in fact the outcome of two mergers that involved sixteen institutions for higher education.

Hogent is the largest college for higher education in Flanders in terms of budget (an income – including state funding and all other incomes - of 105.6 million euro in 2008), staff and student population. It is situated in the city of Ghent in the province of East Flanders. Over 240 000 people are living in Ghent of which more than 50 000 are students. Hogent has 15 500 students and 2 000 staff members. 80% of the staff members is either teaching or doing research (or both). 52% of the staff members are female, 48% male.

Hogent has a wide range of subjects on offer. In 13 different faculties (ranging from ‘Applied engineering sciences’ to ‘Fine arts’) the institution offers 24 professional bachelor programmes, 14 academic bachelor programmes and 22 master programmes. 10 programmes are unique in Flanders.

### *Funding sources of the organization*

All accredited colleges for higher education in Flanders are funded by the Flemish Community (the Ministry of Education and Training) based on their number of students and scientific output. The state funding of Hogent makes up about 78.8% of the institution's resources. Another 6.1% is covered by the tuition fees and 4.7% by research and services.

Because of the public funding, the tuition fees are particularly low (rarely more than 500 euro a year) compared to non-university higher education in other countries.

The institution's budget for research is 13 million euro. In 2008 414 people were doing research at Hogent and 118 employees (FTE) were preparing a doctoral thesis.

### *Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

As a result of the growing participation in secondary education and specific measures taken by the public authorities, the number of students in higher education in general has grown spectacularly during the last decades. This is also the case for the student population of Hogent. Some specific fields of study have known a spectacular increase of enrolments over the last five years (e.g. biosciences and landscape architecture (+173.4%), bachelor in nursing – bridging programme (+100%), etc.).

Although one could say there is a democratization tendency in higher education, still the proportion of certain categories of students stays low (Dewitt & Van Petegem, 2001). Especially the unequal participation by socioeconomic background remains prevalent. In Hogent, like in all other colleges for higher education in Flanders, most of the students have the Belgian nationality (13 932). The amount of foreigners enrolling has been slightly increasing over the last few years (2.1% in 2008). These numbers however still echo the conclusion of Lacante and colleagues (Lacante et al., 2007) stating that the influx of students with a migrant background (even if they have the Belgian nationality) into tertiary education is still problematic.

About half (50.9%) of the student population of Hogent is female, so there is no real gender-inequality gap.

Let us now have a look at the **Faculty of Social Work and Welfare studies**, because the second model of practice (see below) is faculty bound.

The faculty was founded in 1995 and offers two main fields of study: social work (*bachelor in het sociaal werk (maatschappelijk assistent)*) and socio-educational care work (special or remedial education) (*bachelor in de orthopedagogiek (opvoeder A1)*).

48.2% of all students entering the faculty have just left compulsory education (at eighteen). Most of them have a diploma of technical secondary education or of general secondary education.



**Table 2.1** Diploma of secondary education of the first-year students at the Faculty of Social Work and Welfare studies (in %)

Academic year	2003-2004	2007-2008
General secondary education ( <i>algemeen secundair</i> - ASO)	41,00	40,30
Technical secondary education ( <i>technisch secundair</i> – TSO)	51,50	45,40
Vocational secondary education ( <i>beroepssecundair</i> – BSO)	6,12	11,54
Artistic secondary education ( <i>kunstsecundair</i> – KSO)	1,27	1,67

30% of the entrants is 19 years old and 10.8% is 20 or 21 years old at the time of starting their first year. Of all the entrants, about 23% has tried some other study before enrolling for a regular course unit at the faculty.

A fairly large number of students have a part-time job. Of all the students studying socio-educational care work 79.7% is part-time employed. Of all the students in social work, 73% has a part-time job.

*“It is not clear to us why there are so many students with a part-time job. Is it a matter of enhancing their future job prospects, do they need the money to pay for their studies or is it a matter of affording them the luxury of their own car, a nice apartment and so on? We do not know” (E1\_02).*

A lot of students apply (or have to apply) for a grant or scholarship in order to be able to pay for the tuition fee and to pay for their higher education in general. 13.2% of the students are offered a grant by the Flemish government. 14.3% of the students are awarded another type of scholarship or grant. This means about a quarter of the students are offered financial help to pay for their study.

97% of the students are born in Belgium, but only 94.2% has Dutch as their mother tongue.

#### *Access strategies*

The Flemish government grants scholarships and grants to Belgian and foreign students. The scholarships offered are limited. They are only granted if students fulfill specific conditions (not repeating an academic year, registered as a regular student, etc.).

Of course there are also several other scholarship possibilities: scholarships offered by international organizations, Erasmus mobility scholarships, Tempus and Erasmus mundus scholarships, etc.

## **4.2 The access of adults to formal adult education**

### *Institutional strategies, structures and review processes*

The Hogent mission statement is:

‘University College Ghent strives to excel in education, research, service provision and practice of the arts. Through the expertise of its staff and graduates and the valorization of its research, University College Ghent is making a valuable contribution to a critical, creative and open society’ (<http://www.hogent.be>)

One of the policy objectives of Hogent is: ‘to facilitate the transfer of students and the intake of new students’ (<http://www.hogent.be>). The institution’s website claims that independence, competencies, creativity, a critical eye and problem-solving skills are qualities that are growing in importance. That is why, still according to the institution’s website, Hogent is evolving towards competence-based education with interactive working methods.

#### *Admission policies*

To be granted admission to a regular bachelor programme, a student must hold a certificate of secondary education from the Flemish Ministry of Education or an official equivalent or another certificate or diploma at a higher level.

To be admitted to a master program one must have obtained a bachelor degree or a diploma that can be recognized as being equivalent. The degree of bachelor is only awarded after successfully completing 180 ECTS-study points at a college for higher education or university.

Because nearly all courses at Hogent are being lectured in Dutch, all students must have a thorough knowledge of Dutch before enrolling in a course (see below: model of practice 1).

There are no entrance exams. No central limit is placed on the number of student enrollments.

#### *Recognition of prior learning*

Hogent has a student’s guide on the recognition and validation of prior learning (<http://www.hogent.be/studeren/succes/documents/LinknaarEVC-handleiding-1.pdf> (in Dutch)).

One person in the administrative staff is responsible to help students in the process of validating their prior learning.

#### *Supports*

Hogent guides and coaches its students throughout their course of study. The institution does so to optimize their chances of graduating.

Like many other colleges for higher education, Hogent has a centre for study advice and coaching and a centre for students. The first one offers advice on the students’ learning path (certificates, credits, exams, validation of prior learning, fulltime or part-time studying, etc.) and offers support during the learning process (tutoring, coaching, individual course units, etc.). The latter one is called *Sovoreg* and runs a complete range of student services such as accommodation, catering,

cultural events, sports, medical assistance, transport, guidance for disabled students, emotional support/counseling and so on.

### 4.3 Models of practice

#### **Language project - 'Language as springboard to higher education' (Taal als Springplank tot het Hoger Onderwijs)**

##### *Objectives of practice*

*"Language and literacy are everywhere: in every exam question, even in every scheme for an exam, in every class, in every document. They pervade all aspects of education"* (E1\_01).

A while ago the Hogent staff noticed that more first year students than ever before lack sufficient literacy skills. Having the right type of vocabulary, the right academic register and being able to use grammar in a correct way is nevertheless becoming increasingly important in higher education (E1\_01).

Because so many students had problems with (among others) vocabulary and grammar, Hogent decided to offer external support to those groups.

The overall goal of this project is to offer support to students with literacy or linguistic problems so that they can start their study programme without having to cope with language or literacy barriers. By doing so, the project widens the access to education at the moment of entry.

Another key element of the project is making teachers aware of the language that they use and the fact that not all students comprehend and are able to use that language in the same way and to the same extent. Teachers are also made aware of the fact that they have to set an example and use good language themselves.

##### *Target groups*

The target population of this project consists of all students entering Hogent without sufficient literacy or linguistic skills.

According to one interviewee (E1\_01) this is the case for some students with a diploma of General secondary education (*algemeen secundair – ASO*) but particularly for students with a diploma of Technical secondary education (*technisch secundair – TSO*) or Vocational secondary education (*beroepssecundair – BSO*).

As can be expected, students having Dutch as their second language sometimes lack the required entry-level literacy skills as well.

##### *Funding sources*

The project is funded by the Flemish Encouragement Fund (*Aanmoedigingsfonds*). The use of this

fund is specified in the Decree on the Funding of the Activities of university colleges and universities in Flanders (*Decreet betreffende de financiering van de werking van de hogescholen en de universiteiten in Vlaanderen*, B.S. 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2008). This Decree was adopted in the Flemish Parliament on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2008.

The fund is used to finance new policy spearheads and to promote equal opportunities and cultural diversity.

Four people are working full time on this project (from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November on there will be five people involved in the project). Three of them (from November on, four) are researchers specialized in language education. The fourth (fifth) employee offers scientific support and hands-on technical support on the screening instrument (see below).

Faculties do not invest any money; they participate in the project and use project funds. Every collaborating faculty (10 out of 13) also invests a 20 % FTE in the project. This means one member of each participating faculty works on the project during one day a week. Those ten people are the project's steering committee.

#### *Project description*

The project consists of a large scale literacy screening during the intake of the new first-year students. This screening is not compulsory but is still looked upon as 'required'. If a student passes the literacy screening, no measures are taken. If the student does not achieve a sufficiently high test score he or she is offered direct literacy support. This is not a forced educational pathway or an obliged extra training. The feedback given is free of obligations.

The screening takes 40 to 90 minutes. An electronic screening instrument has been developed for this. The *Edumatic* software that is used makes it possible to follow all units being tested and makes sure the process of testing goes as smooth as possible (E1\_01). At the moment of the interviews (4<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) Hogent was pilot testing the screening instrument and determining the 'critical levels of competence' (the built-in cut-off points in the screening instrument). The first public reactions to the test were positive. The actual screening takes place during the students' welcome week (September 2009).

Several literacy skills and scales are being tested: listening, reading, writing (sentence structure, spelling, etc.), etc.

First of all there is a general introduction to the screening procedure for all students. In most cases, the screening will happen in group. This way the procedure is supervised, which ensures students cannot copy answers or ask someone else (e.g. another student) to review their test

answers.

There will be no diagnosis of the test results. A diagnosis aims at achieving a more far-reaching analysis of the factors that have led to certain achievements, or of the profile of the individual skills within the overall skills level (Vermeersch et al., 2009). The test only has a warning function. There will be a diagnosis of the test results of a limited number of students (i.e. the students with the poorest results, whom we wish to encourage to participate in the workshops, etc.).

The literacy support offered in order to remedy a possible lack of literacy and linguistic skills consists of three steps:

- An e-learning environment for individual study. This is in fact an e-learning application with different levels (from basic to advanced) to exercise literacy and linguistics in an individual way.
- Literacy workshops. These workshops give students the opportunity to exercise literacy skills (also oral language skills) in a direct way. Possibly, also tailor-made courses ‘Dutch as a second language’ will be offered too. These courses would be geared towards entrants that do not have Dutch as a mother tongue. The workshops would be organized in collaboration with ‘The Perspective – Provincial centre for adult education’ (*Het Perspectief – Provinciaal Centrum for Volwassenenonderwijs*).
- Personal counseling. During office hours some of the students will be able to get feedback on their test results. The feedback will be given by either one of the ten members of the steering committee of the project or by some other teacher.

Someone with serious literacy challenges or difficulties will be referred to other services (outside the college for higher education).

#### *History/background of this model*

The project started the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008 and will be finished by the end of the year 2010. The idea is to create a transversal policy on literacy and language that will link all fields of study and will influence the agenda of all policy domains and Hogent faculties. The screening of the new students is critical to the success of this endeavor. Another important element that precedes the screening is a survey among tutors on how they would assess the level of language and literacy of their students (Vanderhoudelingen, 2009).

#### *Number of participants*

Over 4 000 students will be doing the literacy test within the timeframe of one week.

#### *Priority needs for expansion of the model/service*

One interviewee looks upon the language policy of Hogent as a work in progress. Next to the

screening, other awareness-raising tools will possibly be used, the interviewee says. A workshop for teachers is one idea.

*“This campaign will be tailored towards teachers. It will offer them support in answering open-ended questions like: how do I phrase a good exam question? What is a standard language requirement for an examination? How do I offer feedback? How do I make a good and carefully drafted report in clear and understandable language?” (E1\_01).*

The workshops for teachers will probably be complemented with other tools, like a check list.

#### *Outreach*

Ten faculties are collaborating on this project. The scale of this project is one of the elements that make it unique. It goes without saying that the required level of literacy varies between the different faculties. Students enrolled in the field of study of applied linguistics need to have another basic literacy level than students in, for instance, arts (although the discussion about this is still ongoing). That is why the tasks in the screening procedure will be properly contextualized and related to the major or field of study the student is working in.

#### *Perceived strengths and weaknesses*

One of the perceived strengths is the fact that there is a strong basis for the implementation of the project.

*“A lot of people are working on the project. The social basis of the project within the college for higher education is motivating” (E1\_01).*

There is no discrimination or stigmatization caused by the project since all students have got to do the test. The fact that negative test results will not be penalized also shows the effort the college really wants to make for students with language and literacy problems, one interviewee explains (E1\_02).

At the same time the size and scale of the project is one of the possible weaknesses or threats.

*“The aim of the project is to screen all first-year students in the participating ten faculties. This is over four thousand students who will have to perform a language test using a digital screening device. Of course a lot of things can go wrong” (E1\_01).*

**Diversity policy plan (Departement SOAG – Diversiteitsbeleid: de visietekst)**
*Objectives of practice*

This project takes place in the faculty of Social Work and Welfare studies (Hogent). The aim of this project is to produce and implement a diversity policy plan (for the students and for the faculty in general) that integrates elements like diversity and equal opportunities.

By offering the right didactic interventions and facilities for groups at risk for exclusion, Hogent will become more inclusive and adapting to all types of learners, the interviewee states (E1\_02).

*Target groups/Project content*

The diversity policy plan proceeds from the dictum: to cogitate about diversity is to cogitate about identity. The social identity of the students as well as the corporate identity of the faculty is taken into account when outlining a policy on diversity. The latter one is defined by four factors:

- The general identity of the faculty. The fact that each student is unique in several ways is one of the most important starting points of the general identity of the faculty, the interviewee explains (E1\_02). It means all students differ on a number of points. Because of that a category-specific policy was declined and an 'extremely diverse intake and transfer of students' became possible (Van Kerckhove, 2009: 3). In other words: the faculty did not make a decision on which target groups will be targeted and recruited, because that decision is hard to objectify. That is why the faculty doesn't and will not prefer certain categories over others (because of the risk of discriminating some categories).

'The fact that the Faculty, to profile the entrant, uses a variant of the English model [groups are not the starting point but individuals are] already implies that we allow 'a thousand flowers to grow' (...) The directors choose a model in which the student is given full reign to develop his social identity. From a socio-economic perspective, this means that the (corporate) identity of the Faculty of Social Work partly consists in reducing, as much as possible, the risk of exclusion. Its ambition is to reduce that risk to zero' (Van Kerckhove, 2009:3)

*"One of the basic principles for the plan was: we will not focus on specific target groups. For instance, we will not focus on deaf and hard of hearing students, although they are under-represented in our institution. We could have done so, we could have attracted some interpreters, but this would cost a lot in terms of money and time with no guaranteed success" (E1\_02).*

- The specific identity of the faculty. This encloses all pedagogical-didactic methods and a rational offer of training facilities. It includes individually-tailored learning support and the provision of general learning tools. Instead of working on a category-specific policy, the

faculty works on a well- and pre-conceived facilities-driven policy. This means Hogent focuses on target groups in an indirect way.

‘The Faculty of Social Work operates in a non-discriminatory way to develop its diversity policy when it checks what facilities it can offer. This fact is of crucial importance. It objectively fixes the boundaries and training opportunities of the Faculty of Social Work. This range of training courses on offer defines its (corporate) identity and, with this identity, it positions itself in the education market. A well-developed PR support system is imperative in that respect. Students who can identify themselves with this facilities-driven identity may enrol’ (Van Kerckhove, 2009:5).

- Corollary identity. This identity is made of the rules of the college for higher education and the supervision of consistent compliance with those rules.

‘(...) the more diverse the population, the clearer rules have to be. For instance, it has to be crystal clear why student A gets training facilities while student B doesn’t’ (Van Kerckhove, 2009:6)

- Quality identity. While encouraging diversity, the faculty also wants to uphold the quality of its education. This means, enhancing diversity is not just a matter of keeping an eye on who enters the institution but moreover a matter of monitoring the learning outcomes of those enrolling.

#### *Funding sources*

The diversity plan of the Faculty of Social Work and Welfare Studies was subsidized by the provincial authorities of the province of East Flanders of which Ghent is the capital.

The Faculty of Social Work and Welfare studies received support from the Centre for Diversity & Learning (CDL) during the process of policy planning. The CDL is a support agency attached to the Ghent University. Its objective is ‘to support the interculturalism of the Flemish education world by providing a coherent and scientifically-based support to professionals and organizations active both inside and outside the field of education’ (<http://www.steunpuntdiversiteitenleren.be>).

#### *Institutional climate/history/background of this model*

Hogent has a tradition in organizing so-called “Diversity walks” for first-year students. This is a simple walk through the city centre of Ghent and a visit to the Worldcentre (which is the local supporting agency for global issues). In the afternoon, after the walk, some testimonies are given by migrants and foreigners.

*“For a lot of students this event was a shock. It gave the project a kick-start because it made*



*us realize diversity – and not only cultural diversity – is an issue we should pay more attention to. (...) Things have changed in society. There is more diversity now than before. This is also the case within tertiary education” (E1\_02).*

*Priority needs for expansion of the model/service*

One of the challenges of the project at this moment is putting it all into practice.

*“The policy plan encloses a vision and a mission. But it is not a reality yet. The work of translating it into practice is still ongoing. This will take some extra effort of the faculty staff members. The ultimate question is: are they willing to make that extra effort. I am sure the effort will be rewarded in the long run” (E1\_02).*

Much of this work is done by four working groups:

(1) A working group on Key Competencies

This working group focuses on how teachers and administrative staff members could and should manage diversity. At the moment of the interviews, a survey among staff members was planned. The results of this survey are expected to be available by the academic year 2010-2011.

(2) A working group on Perception and Diversity

This working group decided to perform a survey among students. The aim of the survey is to gain insight in the overall perception of diversity among students. The results will be available by October 2009.

(3) A working group on Facilities

This group makes an inventory of all specific facilities for students: the type and categories of facilities, the authority being responsible for it (the faculty, the department, the management of Hogent, Sovoreg, etc.). Examples of such facilities are: PC-software for students experiencing dyslexia, books with another and bigger font type for students who have a visual disability special attention for the modification of the behavior of students experiencing ADHD and ADD etc.

(4) A working group on Pedagogical issues and Didactics

This working group focuses on an awareness-raising policy.

*“All staff members should become aware of the fact that using an academic and middle class language with a lot of technical jargon could in fact be discriminating. By valuing the middle-class literacy norms as the only correct ones, other norms are immediately perceived as insufficient” (E2\_02).*

The four working groups are in fact rather small groups consisting of employees with a coordinating position. The interim conclusions of the working groups will be presented at an employees' meeting (soon after the moment of interviewing).

#### *Perceived strengths and weaknesses*

One of the perceived strengths of the plan is, according to the interviewee, the vision it reflects.

*“It is a clear and understandable policy plan. It is however not a middle-of-the-road plan but an innovative and thought-provoking one” (E1\_02).*

One of the weaknesses mentioned by the interviewee is that it is still work in progress. Translating the vision of the plan into practice (see above) is one of the major challenges of the project today. But once that is done, the plan should become a hub for a lot of new initiatives on diversity.

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### SECTION 3

#### NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION

##### 1. Background information on non-formal adult education in Flanders

Clearly, non-formal adult education can take place in various societal domains: culture, work, welfare, social work, etc. In all these domains, non-formal education can have various meanings. This makes it hard to pinpoint non-formal educational work in Flanders. It is not something that (only) takes place in formal educational contexts like schools. There is not really a fixed structure in non-formal adult education. It occurs in different locations and using a wide range of media, products and processes.

All organizations that provide non-formal education have in common that they offer adults the opportunity to learn outside the traditional school customs and without aiming at formal qualification or certification. At the same time these institutions are clearly vehicles of learning and sites for educational engagement.

The predefined output is not essential in non-formal adult education but the learning method and process itself is.

In this section we offer a short overview of the most important institutions for non-formal adult education in the Flemish Community. We focus on the status and extent of non-formal adult education, we offer background information on the institutions (e.g. funding sources, childcare, fees, etc.) and background data to profile target groups for access strategies.

##### *Socio-cultural education*

In the Flemish Community non-formal adult education is, in the first place, to be associated with socio-cultural adult work (Gehre, 2008). The socio-cultural adult work sector is the competence of the Flemish Ministry of Culture (not the Ministry for education). Because of this, the policy emphasis in this line of work is not clearly an educational one. It also serves other purposes, like social cohesion, inclusion and activation. Sensitization, culture and animation are also important for this sector. All these issues are, however, to some extent linked to the educational function of the work.

What kind of non-formal adult education does the sector of socio-cultural adult work provide for? One could look at the Flemish socio-cultural adult work as a form of 'popular education', which means it is rooted in the real interests and struggles of the people (Crowther et al., 2005). Socio-cultural adult work is however not just a group of institutions where individuals can gain individual competencies so that they are able to cope with their own struggles. It is also a matter of enhancing collective growth and emancipation as well as social change. In other words: this

type of non-formal education empowers people to learn and develop themselves so that they are able to connect their personal experiences to societal problems and engage in action. All this is sometimes, although rather rarely, inspired by economic objectives. Especially the social, cultural and ethical aspects come into focus.

Socio-cultural adult work is well developed in Flanders. It has developed slowly but strongly over the last hundred years in response to some large societal challenge, strain or crisis (examples here are the women's movement, the "new" environmental movement, the union movement, the peace movement, etc.). Looking at the recognized and subsidized organizations for socio-cultural adult work today, we still notice a strong reference to those societal challenges and developments.

Today, there are four types of socio-cultural organizations (<http://www.socius.be>):

- **Associations** (*Verenigingen*): associations are networks of local divisions, departments or groups run by volunteers (along the lines of informal social networks). These divisions or groups are not simply networks of groups of previously unorganized individuals. Associations require an input of "organising activity". Associations schedule activities for members or for other interested people. These include cultural, leisure, educational and community-based activities.
- **Training-plus-centres** (*Vormingplus-centra*). Since 2003 thirteen regional folkhighschools are being recognized and subsidized by the Flemish public authorities. These organizations, now named Training Plus-centers, set up and coordinate non-formal education for adults in Flanders and Brussels, each in their own region. They organize a wide range of activities themselves: courses, workshops, lectures, excursions, expositions, etc.
- **Specialized training institutions** (*Landelijke vormingsinstellingen*). These organizations are, like the Training-plus-centers, providers of non-formal training for adults. Unlike the Training-plus-centers, they are specialized in one or several specific target groups (adults with a disability, union members, etc.) or themes (arts education, social service, personality and relationships, nature and environment, etc.). They organize their activities all throughout Flanders and Brussels. They do not work for a specific region.
- **Movements** (*Bewegingen*). Like the specialized training institutions, the movements are specialized in one or a few specific themes. In order to support social change, the movements organize activities to inform and sensitize people and try to involve them in social action. The term 'movements' refers to the so-called 'social movements' and 'new social movements' as a kind of group action with a specific social or political agenda.

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) socio-cultural education is to be situated on level 1 to 5B (OECD, 2004).

At this moment 128 socio-cultural organizations are offered government funding by the Flemish Community (FOV, 2008). These non-profit organizations all mainly rely on those state subsidies. The government policy has caused a strong professionalization of the field of socio-cultural education since the 1970s (De Meyer, 2006). Still, most of the organizations in socio-cultural adult work are independent from government. This is especially the case for the associations, which are considered to be an important part of the civil society – separate of state structures and commercial institutions.

Nearly all programmes in socio-cultural education are open to all adults. In some cases, certain categories of adults are encouraged to participate. This is done by means of advertisement and of incentives. Selection tests are never used in socio-cultural education.

There is no information or research available on the organization of childcare in socio-cultural education. One case in this study will illustrate some socio-cultural organizations do offer childcare during some programmes, although this is not a common practice for all.

Not all activities in socio-cultural adult work are free of charges, although most of them are. Most associations and a few movements earn part of their income from paid membership (FOV, 2008). Adults who purchased membership are offered some benefits (e.g. a reduced tuition fee for some activities). None of the Training-plus-centres and specialized training institutions offer paid or free membership.

Little is known about the participation and participants in socio-cultural adult work. Hence, there is no detailed information on the participation of educationally deprived groups in socio-cultural education.

#### *VDAB training centers*

One other type of organization that offers adults educational opportunities that are not part of an agreed and validated curriculum at an official level is the VDAB. The VDAB (*Vlaams Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling* - the Flemish Public Employment Service) is a public institution supervised by the Flemish Ministry of Employment. The VDAB is financed by the Flemish government and also receives funds from the European Union. The organization is controlled by representatives of employers and trade unions (on an equal basis). The VDAB offers and recognizes vocational training (from pc-training and welding, up to languages and fork-lift truck operator) focused on the labour market, closely related to the experiences, requirements and educational needs of individual employees or jobseekers. The duration of the programmes varies greatly.

Although VDAB is not part of the educational system, the institution provides trainees with a specific certificate. These certificates are not comparable to official diplomas awarded by the educational sector, but are nevertheless well known and highly regarded by employers (Vermeersch & De Rick, 2008; Rosen & Demeyer, 2008). According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) the training courses by the VDAB are to be situated on level 1 to 5B (OECD, 2004). The typical starting age of the different programmes is above eighteen (as education is compulsory until the age of eighteen).

The VDAB training centers do not offer childcare themselves. However, the VDAB works in close cooperation with Child & Family (*Kind & Gezin*), the Flemish governmental agency with responsibility for young children and families in Flanders. This agency regulates child care services in Flanders. The two organizations together make sure that adults are offered a childcare allowance for the duration of the course.

Generally, there are admission requirements imposed by VDAB. In a very few cases a selection test must be passed.

Unemployed jobseekers pay no registration fees. For them the regular VDAB courses as well as the web learning courses are free. Any employee who follows a programme at his/her own initiative does pay a fee. Employees can use training vouchers (*opleidingscheques*) to pay for the training costs. The training vouchers are a cost reducing measure that covers some of the training costs. It is an initiative of the Flemish Government to stimulate lifelong and life wide learning. By using the training vouchers employees can reimburse half of the course fee.

In the case where an employer organizes a course with VDAB (in-house or at a VDAB training centre) the fee depends on the type of course, the duration, the location, the number of participants, etc.

#### *SYNTRA training centers*

Like the VDAB, SYNTRA Flanders is a public agency. The agency depends on the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy. SYNTRA Flanders is responsible for the coordination of training towards entrepreneurship. Together with several local training centers (the local SYNTRA training centers who are part of the SYNTRA network consisting of five umbrella organizations) the agency offers entrepreneurial training courses all over Flanders. The local SYNTRA training centers and the umbrella organizations are recognized and subsidized by SYNTRA Flanders. SYNTRA Flanders also collaborates with other entrepreneurial training providers.

The SYNTRA courses are open to all adults. In some cases a specific previous education or a professional experience is required.

The registration fees vary according to the course. Participants can purchase training vouchers to pay the tuition fee. Small and medium-sized enterprises can also purchase training vouchers. These vouchers are part of a special scheme of the Flemish government (called the entrepreneurial portfolio or budget for economic advice).

#### *Other non-formal adult education organizations*

There are many other institutions that offer non-formal adult education to some extent. We mention them here but will not describe them in detail, because either non-formal lifelong learning is not their core business or there is no specific relation to the cases in this report:

- training in agriculture: vocational education aimed at agriculture. This is offered in recognized training centers for agriculture;
- the art and cultural heritage sector. Non-formal education in this sector is organized by arts institutions and individual artists, museums, music groups, theatres and music groups. They offer several cultural activities aiming at the general development of cultural competencies;
- NGOs and development partners offer different kinds of non-formal education in Belgium and abroad.

#### *National policy documents on access to non-formal adult education*

For all of the types of non-formal adult education mentioned above, there is a legal framework. Here is a short list of the core legislation on non-formal education in the Flemish Community.

- Socio-cultural adult work: Decree dd. 4 april 2003;
- VDAB: Decree dd. 7 May 2004;
- SYNTRA Flanders/SYNTRA training centers: Decree dd. 7 May 2004.

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#### *Additional information*

- <http://www.evta.net>
- [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/structures/041\\_BN\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/structures/041_BN_EN.pdf) (Eurydice 2008 Edition)
- <http://www.socius.be>

## **2. Case 1: Citizenne**

### **2.1 Background information**

#### *Features of the institution/information on the interviewees*

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Type of education</i>: non-formal adult education</li> <li>– <i>Type of institution</i>: folk high school/Training-plus centre (<i>Vormingplus-centrum</i>)</li> <li>– <i>Name of the institution</i>: Citizenne – Vormingplus Brussel</li> <li>– <i>Interviewee 1</i>: senior manager (D1_01)</li> <li>– <i>Interviewee 2</i>: adult learning practitioner (D1_02)</li> </ul> |
|--|

*Citizenne* also known as Training-plus Centre Brussels (*Vormingplus Brussel*), is a non-profit folk high school situated in Brussels, the capital of Belgium. The organization's mission is to make a valuable contribution to the social cohesion in the city of Brussels by providing socio-cultural activities. These activities are non-formal educational ones and include cultural, leisure, community-based objectives.



The name of the organization '*Citizenne*' refers to the 'city' which is the ground of action for the organization and to the 'Zenne' which is the river that flows through the city of Brussels; furthermore the name also refers to 'active citizenship' as an overall aim of the organization.

Some of the main objectives of *Citizenne* are:

- working on the bridging between communities and groups of people living in the different Brussels districts;
- creating opportunities for cultural and social involvement for all the people living in Brussels;
- enhancing social integration in and through the civil society.

In doing so, the organization takes into account some of the specific characteristics of Brussels.

Some examples are:

- there is a strong social polarization in the city. This is reflected in, for instance, high unemployment among young migrants;
- Brussels is a city known for its cultural diversity: people with a lot of different nationalities and cultures all live together. Adults with Dutch as their mother tongue are actually a minority in Brussels. We will give some more details later on the *Citizenne* target groups and the language they use;
- there are a lot of organizations offering non-formal adult education in Brussels. There is also a wide range of high-quality training opportunities for the Dutch-speaking population of Brussels. Over the last six months of the year 2005 more than 2,200 non-formal educational programmes were offered by over 200 different organizations.

Because of these characteristics, the organization focuses on some specific target groups and target issues.

First of all, the organization tailors its services to the needs of specific groups under- participating in the field of adult education in Brussels, such as low educated adults (especially those having left compulsory education without a qualification).

Planning intercultural programmes is also essential for the organization. One can not presuppose that in a city like Brussels and its metropolitan area people and groups of people find each other spontaneously in the mosaic of cultures and communities. Therefore, *Citizenne* explicitly wants to connect different cultures and communities in the city with each other.

The organization has been focusing on three types of issues over the last five years:

- City and community development and urban characteristics

Working on issues that urban communities and neighbourhoods are facing today (e.g. growing inequity, growing unemployment, economic recession, ethnic and socio-economic polarization, etc.) by means of community building and urban development.

– Intercultural dialogue in a multicultural society

The ethnic diversity among its residents is a characteristic of any major city. Guiding and supporting intercultural processes (debates, discussions, exchange of ideas, etc.) between different cultural communities and ethnic groups so that they can meet in a friendly atmosphere (see model 1).

– Empowerment

Helping people and groups that experience social discrimination to regain and increase their social strength, using methods like consciousness-raising and social action (see model 2).

These focuses arose from the region analysis and the SWOT-analysis the organization applied when making a strategic plan. By doing so, the organization is able to clearly analyse the needs of the people living and working in Brussels.

*Funding sources of the organization*

A major subsidy is granted by the Flemish ministry of Culture. In the year 2006 *Citizenne* received 476 993,06 euro. The organization also receives financial aid of the government of the Brussels-Capital region (Department of Culture, Youth and Sports). Although the organization derives some income from its registration fees (usually very small contributions), donations, etc., most of the incomes are related to the state subsidy. The strategic plan, incorporating the mission and vision of the organization and its strategic decisions on what to do, constitutes an important means in obtaining these financial resources. The organization makes a strategic plan every four to five years. In general, compared to most formal educational institutions, *Citizenne* has quite limited resources.

*Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

▪ Language

An important aspect to profile target groups in a multilingual city like Brussels is the language of the (potential) participants. About 55 percent of all *Citizenne's* present participants today are to be considered Flemish (which means they have Dutch as their mother tongue). 45 percent of the participants are not Flemish; they are either Walloon or migrants that have a different mother tongue. Nevertheless, most of the *Citizenne* activities are in Dutch. The interviewed coordinator argues that for some non-Dutch mother tongue speakers, attending activities in Dutch is a way of learning and practicing the Dutch language. For them, the use of another language is in fact a

motivation to attend a class or activity, not a barrier. In half of the cases, there is a translation into French, English, Arabic, or some other language. This means 50 percent of the programmes are bilingual.

- Gender

The current participants are mainly female (65 per cent). The organization does not take any steps to reach more men, because this is not a priority to the organization, the coordinator explains. In some cases, teachers try to engage male participants in an indirect way, for instance by encouraging the female participants to bring their husbands and children.

According to research, not more than 0.2% of all the activities of all thirteen Training-plus centers are directly aimed at attracting more male participants (FOV, 2008, p. 50).

#### *Access strategies*

- Childcare

The organization rarely organizes childcare for the participants' children. This is only the case for bigger events and some family-oriented courses and events. Nevertheless, the fact that not finding childcare might be a barrier to participation is something *Citizenne* takes seriously; for instance by avoiding activities on Wednesday afternoon when there is no school.

- Reduced fees

Not all activities are free of charges, although many are. Because of the organization's funding it is impossible to offer all activities for free. One of the institution's main principles related to the tuition fee is: the price should not be a barrier to participation.

The enrollment fees are differentiated:

- illegal immigrants and refugees, who have no income, pay no tuition;
- adults with a substitute income enjoy a reduced tuition;
- students and elderly people are eligible for remission of tuition fees;
- all other adults pay a full tuition which is maximum 15 euro per day.

The organization does not ask for any identity papers to check this – which is merely a matter of avoiding paperwork.

## **2.2 The access of adults to non-formal adult education**

### *Background organizational context*

There are several elements used by the organization in order to offer adults (vulnerable or not) access to non-formal education. One important element concerning the organizational context is the collaboration with other organizations. To obtain the best demand-supply agreement as possible, *Citizenne* collaborates with a lot of other organizations. This happens for several

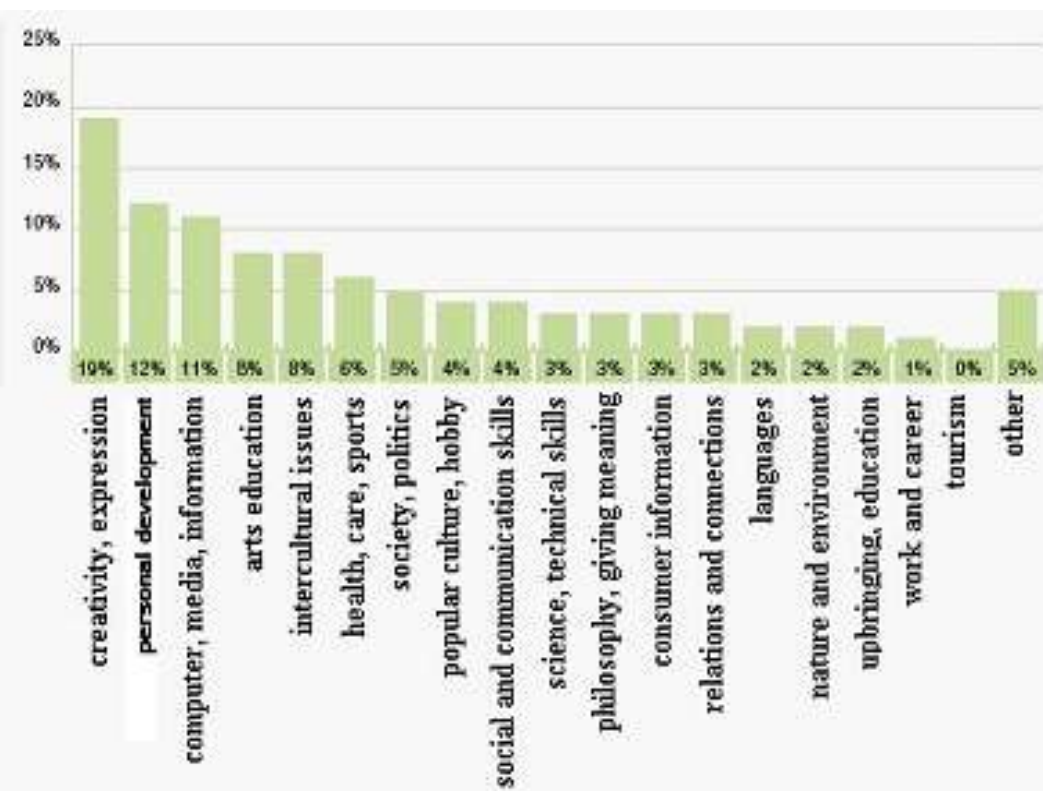
reasons; first of all because of scale advantages, but also to attract new target groups. The coordinator says:

*“Citizenne is a small organization offering non-formal adult education – too small to carry out big projects on its own. Working together with other companies and organizations creates possibilities and leads to a win-win situation for all, as long as all partners stand by an agreement on what is to be done by who (...) Through all sorts of institutional collaborations the participants of one organization are introduced to the activities of others and vice versa” (D1\_01).*

#### Course content and tutor teaching methods

All the educational activities deal with one or more of the three major issues mentioned above. In the educational activities these themes are dealt with in an integrated way because they are always closely interconnected.

The educational supply concerning issues like personal growth, development and empowerment, relational issues, self management, self-assertion, self-awareness, etc. is the most popular, no matter what the specific target group of the activity is. This is also the case in the other folk high schools. This is illustrated by the figure below that offers an overview of the themes of all Training plus-centers deal with.



Source: FOV, 2008, p. 48  
(own translation)

**Figure 3.1** Courses offered by folk high schools for each theme (%)

As the statistics show, training on intercultural competencies and skills is popular too, and this is certainly the case in *Citizenne* (see model 2).

One of the main and essential starting points of the activities organized by *Citizenne* is making sure the educational activity is life-centered. Both interviewees emphasize that activities should be related to real life events and topics that affect people every day. Such real-world situations and matters of everyday life are: the community or neighborhood, the children's school, (un)employment, traffic, etc.

As a result, the activities deal with issues that are meaningful, known and relevant to the participants. For migrants it is for instance important that they can talk about their country or place of origin or other issues that they care about related to their own situation.

Closely related to this is the fact that adults bring to the courses and activities a vast amount of real-life experiences and skills and knowledge already acquired. The tutors do not ignore this, but value that experience and do use the background, skills and knowledge of the learning group. There must be a strong connection between the learner's needs and the subject matter under study; this is also a way of making training and education more personal.

Another aspect is the interactivity of a non-formal learning process. For *Citizenne*, it is important that adult learning occurs in a social context (social learning). This context makes the impact of peers on the educational learning process very strong.

#### *Staff conditions*

Training-plus centres usually have a small staff. All tutors and organizers of the educational programmes (nine in total) have regular long-term contracts. These are not fixed term employment contracts. The rates of pay are, according to the interviewed senior manager, rather high compared to other non-formal educational institutions, though they are not high compared to the wages within the formal educational sector. The working conditions in the non-formal educational sector are being described by the senior manager as heavy. Because the organization accommodates itself to the preferences of the adult learners, a lot of activities take place during weekends and outside ordinary working hours. This demands a vast amount of energy of the employees. Because it is important to use the experiences and background of the participants within the courses and activities, the tutors and organisers must also be very flexible from an educational point of view.

Besides all that, in order to widen access to the educational programmes for specific target groups, it is important to have a culturally diverse staff.

*“How do you attract target groups? By making sure they recognize themselves in the organization. The organization should reflect the target groups or should at least have a representation of the underrepresented risk groups. For instance, by having two migrant employees we are able to attract ethnic groups that would otherwise be very difficult to attract” (D1\_01).*

#### *Target groups*

- Open policy

The organization has a very open policy when it comes to participation. All adults (no matter where they live or work or come from) have the opportunity and right to enroll in nearly all of the programs. There are hardly any educational activities that are tailored to specific (sub)groups in such a way that no one else can enroll for the course or the activity. Still some programs are tailored towards specific target groups (see model 2). When this is the case, this is done purely to promote access for these groups to the regular activities and educational programmes. In other words, although the organization reflects special attention for specific target groups, the entire population of adults working and living in Brussels is considered as a potential audience.

- Target groups

When presenting the features of the institution earlier on, we have already mentioned some target groups the organization wants to focus on. The most important one for the organization is unskilled adults and adults with low levels of prior education. This target group mainly consists of two subgroups:

- migrants and foreigners;
- the poor and needy.

These are both very heterogeneous subgroups (groups of migrants and foreigners also include asylum seekers from refugee centers – see model 2) and they do not constitute mutually exclusive categories. A distinctive characteristic of both subgroups is that they experience a lot of barriers to learning. This is a key criterion in the organization’s strategy in attracting new groups of participants.

The choice of paying extra attention to the target group of unskilled adults and adults with low levels of prior education was made in the organization’s strategic plan 2006-2009. This was in fact a consequence of the context analysis the organization made in 2005. Because there is a large amount of training opportunities for adults in Brussels – formal and non-formal – the organization tried to identify specific groups of non-participants in lifelong learning. The context analysis showed that there was no need for more mainstream non-formal adult education

activities for middle class groups, but a specific need for programmes for people with considerable educational arrears, especially because the barriers to learning for unschooled and low-educated adults in a metropolis like Brussels are many and complex.

*Citizenne* sees for itself a vital role in dismantling educational and cultural barriers and in delivering all adults equal opportunities to learn and to keep learning throughout their lives. The focus in this process on specific target groups is, however, not one that is to be taken for granted.

*“The focus on attracting those new target groups in adult education is always under discussion. Not all Training-plus-centers have made the same decision. Some have a broad mainstream educational supply, not tailored towards any target group and if they work with specific underrepresented groups this is rather occasionally” (D1\_01).*

#### *Connections to the formal educational system*

The interviewed senior manager comes to the conclusion that there is a strong cross-fertilization between formal and non-formal adult education in Flanders and Brussels. This is also the case for *Citizenne*. In a lot of projects, institutions for formal education (offering mainly classroom activities) and institutions for non-formal education (offering mainly out-of-school activities supporting basic skills, etc.) work together. Bridging non-formal and formal adult education however, should not imply that non-formal education should always lead to access to formal education.

*“Citizenne is no “supplier” or “deliverer” of underrepresented or high-risk groups to the formal educational sector, although some of those formal educational institutions look at it that way” (D1\_01).*

Building bridges for learners to the formal education system, should not be one-way traffic, the interviewees indicate. Non-formal educational institutions should facilitate outreach events from formal educational institutions (e.g. organized visits for learners), but this should also be the case the other way around. Adults participating in formal adult education do not always have information on or access to the non-formal educational sector. It is important that institutions promote that link too.

#### *Recognition of prior learning*

The recognition of prior learning is put forward as an important aspect of non-formal adult education. People bring a lot of experiences (e.g. work experiences, experience as a volunteer, etc.), acquired and mastered knowledge and skills into the educational process. It is important to value and use all of that in order to open access for adults to further (formal and non-formal) education and to the labour market.

According to the interviewees, there are a few elements hindering the establishment of a mechanism for the recognition of prior non-formal learning from the point of view of non-formal educational institutions:

- The recognition of prior learning should not mean that all participants should (be able to) obtain a specific certificate or diploma for each non-formal educational activity they attend. The mechanism of the recognition of prior learning could however exert pressure on non-formal educational institutions to start ‘formalizing’ their activities and courses (by means of planning the learning process in advance, assessment, handing out certificates, etc.). Still, argues one of the interviewees, *“we must realize that one can never grasp in a certificate the real learning efforts and outcomes of socio-cultural work for adults”* (D1\_01).
- Secondly, recognizing the effects of prior learning is easy and possible when we are talking about classes and traditional courses for adults followed by some kind of assessment. This is not the case when the educational context is less planned and structured and the objectives are being negotiated with the learners and there is an opportunity to set and share learning goals during the activity.
- Thirdly, the recognition of prior learning needs to be more planned and transparent in the sector of socio-cultural work (and the non-formal educational sector as a whole) than it is done now.

#### *Outreach to marginalised groups*

##### ○ Within communities

According to the interviewees, it is critical to ensure various learning opportunities as close as possible to the adults. Both interviewees accentuate that one can not expect all participants to come into a classroom. The educational activities should be ‘home delivered’. Therefore the organization makes efforts in providing education within the communities, decentralised all over Brussels (in mosques, sports clubs, pubs, etc.).

##### ○ Community leaders

Another important outreach strategy is working together intensely with so-called community leaders (a person who plays a key role in organizing or running activities for the community and who is well known and respected in that locality). As the community leaders are already engaged in processes of community building, they have the power and the role to enhance the participation of others in the community. That is why finding those key persons is an essential task of the organizational staff (tutors and educational experts).



*Citizenne* does not simply use the community leaders as a means to attract new target groups. The organization also trains and coaches them to be organisers and tutors themselves. By doing so, the organization offers them challenges and perspectives in their roles as community leaders and gives them the responsibility to design educational programmes for their community. Some of them make a long-term commitment (at a high level) to the organization; others chose only to make short-term commitments.

It should not go unnoticed that some volunteers and community leaders are also rewarded (according to the Belgian law on volunteering). They receive 25 euro for occasional activities and 110 euro for other activities, according to the amount of responsibility they take. This is an extra motivational element which has a particularly great impact on the participation of some specific target groups.

- Community networks

The support of community leaders into the organizational network is in line with the institutions networking strategy in general. With a view on community development, networking within and between groups (ethnic groups, social groups, neighbourhoods, etc.) is a vital point to open and promote access, emphasize both interviewees. On the matter of networking, one interviewee says:

*“Networking is a matter of personal contacts and being alert for contacts that might be interesting. A network is more than a social structure of individuals contacting each other. It is about having a helicopter view (...) There is also a personal dimension and an engagement of people to do more than just “keep in touch”. It is a matter of using people’s competencies” (D1\_02).*

- Media mix

To reach new target groups, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds and neighbourhoods, it is important to use a differentiated media mix. It is important to realize that the way people receive information and the medium that is used, drives the way they participate and engage in learning. Especially for disadvantaged groups the use of personal invitations and word-of-mouth-advertising is very important.

*“Simply sending or mailing flyers and brochures to potential participants may be counterproductive. It is better to hand it to them... For some groups, like immigrants, calling them by phone or texting a message by mobile phone (not more than one or a few hours before the activity takes place) is one of the most effective communication strategies” (D1\_01).*

### *Future developments*

#### ○ Future of the organization

The interviewees indicate that there are several strategies and levels to strengthen the organization in the near future. The litmus test of the strategic choices the organization made lies not simply in the number of participants but in the way specific target groups are reached and the impact the learning activities have on them. Based on this, the organization decides on its future choices *inter alia* ‘will the organization keep on doing what it is doing? Will it focus on the same target groups or will it focus on a broader audience?’ and will soon be writing these decisions down in a new strategic plan 2011-2015.

Of course, deciding on the organization’s priorities, opportunities, blind spots, etc. is not a one way process, the interviewees argue, it is also a matter of sensing, finding potential interests and seeking response from potential audiences.

*“For us it is important to focus on the participants and the potential participants we want to reach. Communicating with the written and audiovisual press, the policy makers, etc. is also important. But that is not our core business. Visibility is especially important to us on the level of the participants” (D1\_01).*

#### ○ Future of the non-formal adult education sector

According to the interviewees, what adults look for in non-formal adult education institutions is somewhat different and in some cases exactly the opposite of what they experienced in a traditional schooling context or a classroom environment. Both interviewees tend to look upon this as a strength of non-formal adult education rather than as a weakness. It seems therefore important not to formalise the activities any further and offer more courses and classes, but to focus on the real-life effects and benefits of the work.

*“The non-formal adult education sector is rather diffuse – non-formal education is everything and nothing at the same time. It is important to further emphasize the three functions of socio-cultural work for adults and their cross-fertilization. It is not a matter of trying to be another educational institution but being one that is also concerned with education in the broadest sense of the word, including culture, leisure, social change, etc.” (D1\_01).*

*“Another aspect that might become increasingly important is the intercultural dialogue” (D1\_01).*

This last remark will not only be true for the organizations situated in a big city, but for adult education institutions in general.

## 2.3 Models of practice

### Enhancing an intercultural dialogue

#### *Objectives of practice*

In order to open access to all groups of ethnic minorities, it is important to build bridges between natives, Belgians from different origins and foreigners. The objective of the 'when listening is difficult' programme is (1) to discuss the intercultural dialogue and connect this discussion to the daily activities of people and (2) to create tools and methods (a so-called toolbox) to inspire other adult educational institutions to train intercultural competencies.

As a first step, a large group of about 30 adults from very different backgrounds are brought together during three meetings (gespreksgroep). They discuss multiculturalism, diversity of language, culture and religion, etc. This discussion starts off with things people have in common, not by focusing on the differences between people; people are being addressed by the different roles they fulfill in society (employee, citizen, father or mother, inhabitant of Brussels, etc.). Therefore it is particularly important to have a heterogeneous group and for instance not only highly educated adults but also unskilled and low skilled adults. The discussion should start 'bottom up': the participants set the agenda and bring in their own experiences. The guidance of these group meetings is in the hands of adult learning practitioners, using visual aids (paintings on the multicultural society by a painter living in Brussels). The practitioners use the outcomes of these meetings to design new methods and tools to use later on in workshops and courses on intercultural issues.

Another group 'tests' the methods being designed in the first group. This was done during an event for professional workers (teachers, counselors and advisors, etc.) and volunteers active in different societal domains (culture, health care, community development, compulsory education, etc.). About 60 of them participated in seven workshops. During one of those workshops, 'When listening is difficult', different opinions on living in a multicultural society were summarized and written down on post-it notes. These different notes presented the group with excellent food for thought which was discussed in two round tables afterwards.

#### *Target groups*

A wide variety of adults from different ethnic origin, interested in the topic of multiculturalism in the city.

#### *Number of participants*

A diverse group of nearly 100 people (30 in the first group, over 60 in the second group).

#### *Funding sources*

This project is funded by *Citizenne's* regular funding (Flemish government, Brussels authorities, etc.).

*History/background of this model*

This model has only been implemented once in 2008. The main issue is closely associated with the strategic issue of intercultural learning *Citizenne* is working on. In September 2008 *Citizenne* joined the NILE network which brought together adult education organizations from twenty countries in order to promote intercultural learning in adult education across Europe. The NILE project is now finished.

*Location*

Brussels

*Perceived strengths and weaknesses*

*"It is a barrier-free and bottom -up approach. On the one hand, this guarantees a focus on the wording and experiences of the participants. On the other hand, a lot depends on the active approach of participants" (D1\_02).*

*Methods of feedback, evaluation*

A report of this project has been made by *Citizenne*. The toolbox has not been evaluated yet. Both interviewees are convinced that the project is positive and useful in several ways (see objectives above).

### **“I am because we are” programme within the Right 2 Learn project (R2L)**

#### *Objectives of practice*

Everybody has a right to learn. That is the basic assumption of this project. The R2L project is a project for training and education for asylum seekers living in refugee centres (reception care). Because of the position of those adults in Belgium (their insecure legal status, their financial difficulties, etc.), they do not easily get access to the regular and official training and education circuit. The objective of this project is to combat social exclusion by offering the asylum seekers tailor-made education and training. This is not only a matter of giving them a meaningful way to fill their days at the asylum centre, but also a possible improvement of life in the asylum centre and a way to build on their future (for instance by strengthening their chances on the labour market). In short, the main objective of this project is empowerment of the target group.

The pilot project consists of 15 modules - some vocational-oriented, others persons-oriented. One of those modules was called ‘I am because we are’. This module, for which *Citizenne* was responsible, aimed at enhancing social abilities and skills. This means that, as a result, participants are more sure of their ground, can join groups with which they can share experiences, can train and adjust their social skills so that they can always fall back on them (Schmidt-Behlau, 2008).

#### *Target groups*

Asylum seekers from refugee centres. The activities of the R2L project took place between December 2005 and June 2007. [No exact number of participants and service users annually was mentioned in the interviews]

#### *Funding sources*

Funded by the EQUAL programme. The R2L project was coordinated by De Overmolen and implemented by several other organizations. *Citizenne* was one of the partners in this project. Because the R2L project was an international project, the financial provisions and breakdown of the budget was arranged at a cross country level.

#### *History/background of this model*

Working on key skills and promoting social capital are two of the main concerns of *Citizenne* as a non-formal education institution. During the ‘I am because we are’ module the institution focused on the improvement of several key skills (such as acting independently, accepting and respecting differences, problem-solving skills, etc.).

#### *Location*

In Brussels and Flanders (within refugee centres).

*Perceived strengths and weaknesses*

The R2L project has been completed and evaluated positively. According to *Citizenne* as a national partner in the project, the courses surely had an important impact. A positive side-effect was the awareness raised on the issue of refugee centres. A weakness was that in this line of work for this specific target group, there are always cultural and linguistic barriers to take into account.

*Methods of feedback, evaluation*

For *Citizenne*, this project was a success, not only on an organizational level but also in terms of effects (individual progress of the adult learners). Of course, as other authors stated (Schmidt-Behlau, 2008), working on social skills and abilities is not a one-time process but a course that must be experienced, adjusted, practiced, throughout one's life.

**2.4 References**

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### 3. Case 2: SYNTRA Antwerpen-Brabant

#### 3.1 Background information

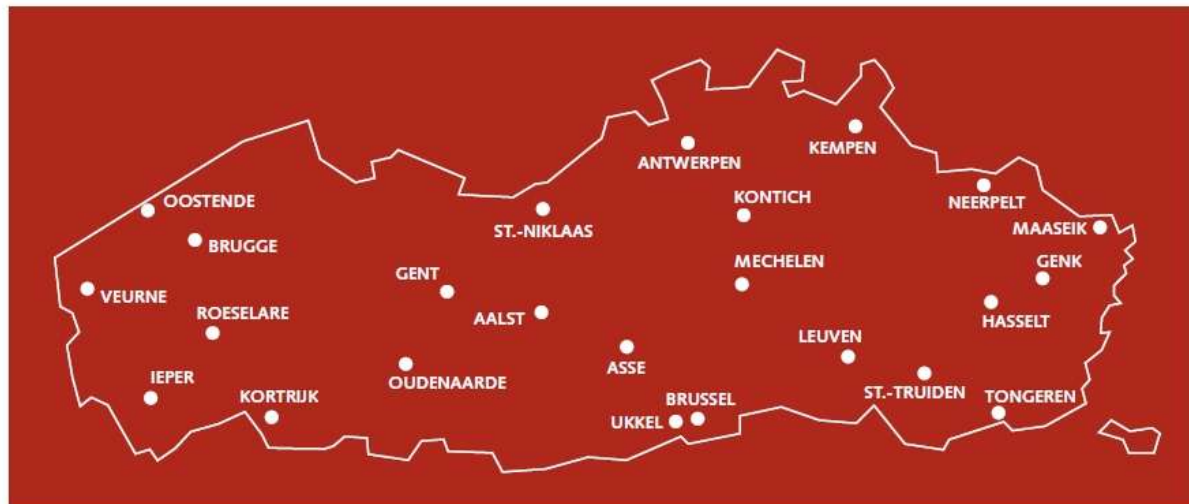
##### *Features of the institution/information on the interviewees*

- *Type of education:* non-formal adult education
- *Type of institution:* SYNTRA
- *Name of the institution:* SYNTRA AB (SYNTRA Antwerpen – Vlaams-Brabant) – campus Leuven (in this case study: SYNTRA AB–L) (D2)
- *Interviewee 1*
  - Diversity manager (D2\_01). She works for SYNTRA Flanders.
- *Interviewee 2*
  - Key person (community leader) in the Kurdish community (D2\_02). He works for SYNTRA AB as a tutor/translator with a fixed term contract.
- *Interviewee 3*
  - Coordinator of the SYNTRA courses on Leuven campus (D2\_03). She works for SYNTRA AB – campus Leuven.

SYNTRA Flanders:

SYNTRA Flanders - Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (*SYNTRA Vlaanderen – Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming*) is the Flemish government agency responsible for entrepreneurial training. It has its headquarters in Brussels.

SYNTRA Flanders wants to work on more and better entrepreneurship. Therefore the agency cooperates closely with 24 local SYNTRA training centers organized in 5 SYNTRA organizations, but also with other actors in the field of entrepreneurial training.



24 SYNTRA-campussen in Vlaanderen

SYNTRA training centre: SYNTRA AB – campus Leuven (SYNTRA Antwerpen – Vlaams-Brabant):

SYNTRA entrepreneurial training is offered at different locations. There are five different and independent SYNTRA organizations in Flanders and Brussels offering training to future and established entrepreneurs. SYNTRA AB is one of those five. SYNTRA AB has four campuses (Campus Kempen, Campus Leuven, Campus Mechelen and Campus Metropool).

*“SYNTRA Flanders is a public agency, part of the public authorities, while the campuses are private institutions being subsidized by the Flemish public authorities” (D2\_01).*

SYNTRA AB-L (SYNTRA AB campus Leuven) is not one of the biggest SYNTRA training centers, but the centre offers a varied range of training possibilities and has known a sustained growth over the last years (D2\_02).

#### *Funding sources of the organization*

SYNTRA Flanders, as a public agency, depends on the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy. The Flemish government has a management agreement with SYNTRA Flanders. This agreement specifies topics related to quality management, monitoring and evaluation, etc. and also diversity and target groups (since 2006). An annual operational subsidy is paid.

The five SYNTRA centers are funded by the Flemish Community on a performance basis.

#### *Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

All SYNTRA training organizations together offer more than 15,000 courses a year. About 15% of the participants do not have a degree of higher secondary education (D2\_01).



Each SYNTRA course should have at least 12 to 15 participants (enrolments) to be held. This is considered the optimal range for an effective course for target groups (D2\_01). For each course there is a maximum too, depending on the teacher, class room, etc.

*“Working on an inclusive policy is never easy. If one focuses too much on a specific target group, such as low-literates or unskilled adults, there is always a risk not enough participants will enrol for the course. In that case the course will be cancelled” (D2\_01).*

Nevertheless, profiling and reaching new target groups is one of the main current objectives of SYNTRA Flanders and of all individual SYNTRA training centers. Each campus has its own plan and vision on attracting new groups: *“they are encouraged to set up experiments, conduct research and development, etc.” (D2\_01).*

### 3.2 The access of adults to non-formal adult education

#### *Background organizational context*

The SYNTRA AB campus Leuven has three main objectives (D2\_03). Offering:

- **(1) Apprenticeship programmes.** Through apprenticeship contracts, students are offered the opportunity to learn on-the-job (*leertijd/leercontract*) in addition to compulsory education. Over 200 vocations can be learned through such apprenticeship contracts. The apprenticeship programmes imply a practical training in a company during four days a week and supplementary courses the other day of the week (Eurydice, 2008).
- **(2) Tailor-made training programmes and updating courses for entrepreneurs and enterprises.** These are mostly (60 to 70 percent) IT courses and computer supported courses. These courses are not being financially supported by the Flemish government.
- **(3) Entrepreneurial training.** This is the core business of the SYNTRA AB-L. Most of the learners enrol for entrepreneurial training. SYNTRA offers accelerated one-year courses in entrepreneurial training, but not all of the courses can be completed in one year. The length of a course can run up to four years. The entrepreneurial training courses either focus on a specific trade or profession, such as beautician or hairdresser, or they focus on business management in general. The general course on business management, taken by more than 6,500 adults a year in Flanders, consists of the necessary business-related knowledge that an independent entrepreneur or a starter needs to master. The courses on business management are typically taught as an evening class. The training course consists of two modules: (1) Business administration and accountancy and (2) making a feasibility study of a small or medium-sized enterprise. Important issues are commercial management, legislation and financial management. These

issues are being lectured by three different teachers. One can attend classes one, two or three times a week. Subsequently the course is longer or shorter.

All entrepreneurial training is subsidized by the Flemish public authorities. At the end of the course the students are rewarded a certificate or diploma.

SYNTRA AB-L specializes in vocational training courses (from standard to tailor-made) (1) on health and personal care (e.g. foot-care, hairdressing, colour and style analysis and advice, etc.) (2) on the hotel and catering industry and (3) on graphic design.

#### *Course content*

*“Every single entrepreneurial training course uses a specific learning plan, which is a planning document encompassing the content, learning aims and didactical elements of the course. The development and maintenance of the learning plans is in the hands of SYNTRA Flanders. The training plans on the entrepreneurial training courses are the same for all five SYNTRA organizations in Flanders and Brussels” (D2\_03).*

#### *Staff conditions*

SYNTRA AB-L has an elaborate pool of teachers for the entrepreneurial courses. All teachers have a fixed-term contract. The period of the contract ranges from a few months up to a year.

Teachers are being paid 30.10 euro per 50 minutes class. Most of them teach about four hours a week, which means a weekly wage of 120 euro. Besides that, they are also offered a holiday allowance once a year.

*“Most of the teachers are self-employed, as an advocate, accountant etc. They look at their job in non-formal adult education as a sort of “additional retirement income” – a little extra for the future. Moreover, it is a way of expanding their social network and perhaps find new future employees. These are reasons that reach past the financial reward. Since most of them earn a lot more during their day-time job, I would even dare to conclude the financial reward is not the strongest motivator for teachers” (D2\_03).*

#### *Target groups*

According to the course coordinator (D2\_03) the student population of SYNTRA AB-L is very heterogeneous, especially the population enrolled in the evening classes. The population ranges from unskilled workers to highly skilled employers, from starters to people having retired.

The courses offered during the day attract more young people. They are especially looking for vocational training within a specific profession. Adults attending evening classes have that same goal but are usually older.

According to the diversity manager (D2\_01) the most important underrepresented groups in the participant population of the SYNTRA training centres are:

- **Unemployed adults.** SYNTRA has an agreement with the VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and vocational training Service) on attracting more unemployed adults. This target group includes unskilled adults (mostly unqualified school leavers) as well as semi-skilled ones.
- **Migrants and foreigners.** This target group easily experiences cultural and language barriers (see below: model of practice 1). Sometimes this leads to an alternative didactic approach, the course coordinator indicates.

*“Most SYNTRA training centres work hard on diversity initiatives. (...) some offer tailor-made courses for immigrants. How this happens differs from one campus to another. There is no central steering done by SYNTRA Flanders although the agency communicates the initiatives towards partner organizations and individuals who act as an intermediary. (...) In other words, SYNTRA Flanders encourages and supports the SYNTRA training centres in several ways in their work on diversity”(D2\_01).*

*“Because of the cultural barriers, we sometimes gather the immigrant women in a separate group during a “pre-course period”. This way they get to know each other and learn to be comfortable with the context of the course and the desired outcomes.(...) this does not stimulate integration, but it is a first step in attracting and motivating this hard to reach group” (D2\_03).*

- **Employees of small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).** This may seem strange for an institution for self-employed and entrepreneurs, but in fact this is a separate and underrepresented target group, *“because most SMEs lack time, money and tools to offer their employees training” (D2\_01).*
- **Older people, disabled people and women.** Older people and disabled people are underrepresented in the SYNTRA participant statistics. This is also the case for female participants. The diversity manager explains that entrepreneurship is particularly hard for women because of the balance between work and family issues (D2\_01).

SYNTRA AB-L does not adopt a category-specific policy when it comes to reaching specific underrepresented groups. The course coordinator (D2\_03) says SYNTRA AB-L offers very few tailor-made courses for specific groups of immigrants. Target groups are being encouraged to register for the regular SYNTRA courses. She goes on to say that for some entrepreneurial training courses this policy turns out to be a success. For instance, of all the registered students taking a hairdressing course, 10 to 15 percent are immigrants. However, for the bulk of the courses the

percentage of enrolled target group members such as immigrants, is in fact just a small proportion of all enrolled students.

*Connections to the formal educational system/developing a strategy for the non-formal sector*

The entrepreneurial training offered by the (non-formal) SYNTRA training centers is sometimes similar to the education and training offered by other institutions for (formal) adult education, but the target groups are different (D2\_02). The SYNTRA training centers focus on adults with the intention of becoming an entrepreneur and on self-employed adults and entrepreneurs. The courses on offer are in other words especially vocation-oriented:

*“People are more than ever before willing to learn (...) although learning and taking courses is a popular hobby for a lot of people nowadays, the SYNTRA course should not be pursued outside ones regular occupation. (...) The impetus for most of the students to get involved in a course is the prospect of settling as an independent entrepreneur. Learning is often – nearly always – related to the issues the adults will have to comply with once they are self-employed (...) there is a minority of students taking courses as a hobby without having serious intentions of working in the field” (D2\_03).*

The centers for adult education (*Centra voor volwassenenonderwijs – CVOs*) do not focus on the self-employed and entrepreneurs. Still, there is a significant and positive spillover effect from the centers for adult education to the SYNTRA training centers and vice versa (D2\_01). Sometimes the CVO courses are quite similar to some of the SYNTRA courses. But both types of institutions try to minimize the overlap and gaps in course offering.

*“SYNTRA offers no language classes. And the courses on trades and crafts should decrease. This is part of an agreement we have with the official centers for adult education. They offer language classes and therefore SYNTRA training centers should not. In return the centers for adult education will cut back their courses on business management” (D2\_01).*

All interviewees agree that there is a good understanding between SYNTRA as an institution for non-formal adult education and other institutions for adult education like the centers for adult education, the VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and vocational training Service), etc. There is a close collaboration with those organizations to attract new potential learners.

There are, however, as good as no paths of progression into formal adult education.

*“This is not what learners usually want. What they are looking for are opportunities to enter or re-enter the labour market or improve their position on the labour market. They want to acquire a professional qualification, not an academic one” (D2\_01).*

*Outreach to marginalized groups*

The SYNTRA training centers reach out to marginalized groups in a variety of ways. To overcome barriers to participation (D2\_01):

- there is a bus service to all of the SYNTRA training centers, so people can rely on public transport to get there and back;
- employees can use a training voucher (*opleidingscheques*) to pay half the tuition fee;
- courses are mainly organized at evenings and on Saturdays so adults with a full-time job are able to participate too;

*Tutors teaching methods*

Working with heterogeneous groups is difficult, one interviewee says (D2\_01). She states that notwithstanding the fact that it might be very interesting for the tutors, it is hard to take into account all the different levels of knowledge and skills.

*“Teachers do more than just lecturing. They offer the students as much support as possible in as many ways as possible, for instance by looking at their papers and draft business plan before they are being submitted” (D2\_01).*

It should also be stressed that the interviewees acknowledge it is important that the tutors are able to adjust the didactic approach of the courses to the underrepresented groups (by use of comprehensible language, visual aids, etc.).

*Perception regarding the impact of the recession on this model/future developments*

The interviewees claim that the recession has had little negative impact on the non-formal entrepreneurial training.

*“There is a slight decrease in the number of enrolments for the business management courses. Perhaps, in these times, less young people dare to start their own business. The enrolments for the other courses are still as high as before” (D2\_03) .*

*“The courses on business management are in all SYNTRA training centres the most offered courses, although there is a slight decrease in the number of courses noticeable. Still, other courses are very popular right now. For instance courses on external care, restaurateur, hairdressing, transport, welding, hygienic and health, etc.” (D2\_01).*

*“Because of the recession, entrepreneurs realize that they need training in business management to successfully run their business” (D2\_02).*

### 3.3 Models of practice

#### Course on business management for Kurdish people

##### *Objectives of practice*

All three interviewees state that when attracting new target groups, especially immigrant groups, the language problem is one of the most important barriers. Non-Dutch-speakers taking a Dutch-spoken course often fail or drop-out simply because of communication problems and misunderstandings resulting from it.

This finding was the starting point for this project. The idea was to create a course, lectured by regular SYNTRA tutors, but with simultaneous translation. That way the language barrier for a specific group of immigrants would be tackled. The translation was not a verbatim translation, but also a way of explaining terms, legal jargon, etc.

At the same time this project was a new learning experience for the tutors.

To make sure no other course characteristics would discourage the potential participants, some other aspects were adjusted.

*“Because attending three times a week was too much for most of the participants, the SYNTRA centre decreased the frequency to two moments a week. (...) The attendance rates for this course were high, over 90 percent. This was necessary. Missing classes would have led to considerable arrear.” (D2\_02).*

##### *History/background of this model*

A lot of Kurdish people start their own enterprise when they come to Belgium. They usually didn't enjoy the right training and education to start a business as an independent entrepreneur. A lot of them lack knowledge of organizational strategies and objectives, management, and so on.

D2\_02 met a few people who were running a business and were planning on taking a course on business management but the Dutch language was a barrier to them. This was the trigger for D2\_02, as a key person in the Kurdish community in Leuven, and SYNTRA AB-L to start this project.

D2\_02 worked as translator on the project. Because he is also Kurdish himself and has a huge network in the Kurdish community in Flanders and Brussels, a lot of people put their trust in him.

##### *Target groups*

This project was targeted towards Kurdish people living in Flanders. Half of the course participants already had a business of their own, the other half was thinking about starting one.

To get admission to the course, the participants had to be able to speak a little Dutch and understand directions. The translation during the course was only meant as a means to improve

their literacy and linguistic skills.

*“Most of them speak a little Dutch, but not enough so that they would tend to enroll for a regular course at SYNTRA. So the immediate translation was a direct motivator to them” (D2\_02).*

Other than that there was no entrance test. There was an application form participants had to fill in at the moment of enrollment. This form could be interpreted as a test (D2\_02) to check their motivation and language skills.

*“Based on the application form some people were refused admission to the course. Basically because their knowledge of the Dutch language was not sufficient. The teacher judged they had little to no chance of passing the end-of-course-examination” (D2\_02).*

Most of the participants are poorly educated. Three participants never went to school in their country of origin (Iraq).

The participants' age ranged from 20 to 38.

#### *Funding sources*

The project (translator, advertisement, etc.) was funded by SYNTRA Flanders.

#### *Number of participants*

In general, about 1 000 to 1 200 students a year take a business management course offered by SYNTRA AB-L. As mentioned earlier, for the courses on business management SYNTRA AB-L uses a minimum of 12 students and a maximum of 25 students. For other courses, like the course for real estate agents, there is no maximum number of students. One of the factors playing a role is the class room capacity. The class capacity is always discussed in advance with the teacher, says the course coordinator (D2\_03).

#### *Model of practice*

14 students signed up for this course (see below).

#### *Location and duration*

The course took place at SYNTRA AB-L in Haasrode, from October 2008 until June 2009. Five participants came from Antwerp to Haasrode (about 65 kilometers) to attend the course.

The training course consisted of 132 regular class hours in total and an additional 44 hours for guidance and support (adaptatie-uren). To be eligible to take the final course exam, one must not have been absent for more than two-thirds of the course.

#### *Perceived strengths*

- Working with intermediate persons and community leaders that play an explicit role in the

educational process is of surplus value (D2\_01).

- The teachers have shown flexibility in working with non-Dutch speakers (D2\_02).
- Through exposure and working with the language, the knowledge of Dutch increased.

#### *Perceived weaknesses*

- The balance work-life-study was hard for all participants (D2\_02).
- Because the course was still lectured in Dutch, the course participants still had to put a lot of time and effort into looking things up, translating text, preparing classes, etc. These are elements that could have enhanced drop-out but eventually did not (D2\_02).

#### *Priority needs for expansion of the model/service*

SYNTRA AB-L is planning a new course in close collaboration with the Kurdish community. This new course will probably be announced soon (after the interviews) and start mid November 2009. One interviewee pinpoints the reason for the course starting that 'late':

*"While most other SYNTRA courses start half September, it is hard to find enough potential students in the Kurdish community by that time. During the summer a lot of Kurdish people visit their home country. A lot of them do not return until the second week of September"* (D2\_03).

D2\_02 would like to organize similar projects himself (on other issues, on other locations) or would like others to organize something similar.

*"I would like to organize something similar for a driver's license training. (...) A lot of Kurdish people are living in Antwerp. Perhaps a course there would be a success too. (...) I spoke about this project to other translators and interpreters. They were interested too (...)"* (D2\_02)

The diversity manager (D2\_01) agrees it would be interesting to see the project repeated with other groups. To her, the model of practice seems transferable to other communities (such as the Portuguese (speaking), Polish, Romanian community, etc.)

SYNTRA Flanders is also working on the expansion of this model on a larger scale. The agency is elaborating a new project to introduce so-called 'language coaches' and 'learning coaches' into the educational process. Those coaches do more than simply translate words or sentences during a course. Like in this project, the notion of a language coach is more inclusive; the idea is that support on language and literacy is not only helpful during the classes but also before and afterwards. A learning coach can help examine meta-cognitive competencies like learning to learn, planning, self-discipline, etc.

In order to avoid stigmatisation, these initiatives are embedded.



*“SYNTRA Flanders puts a lot of effort and money into language coaching. The idea is that the better the support, the more target groups will be able to succeed in finishing a course and starting their own enterprise” (D2\_03).*

#### *Methods of feedback, evaluation*

According to all interviewees, the project was an organizational success. From the point of view of the participants, the course was successful too. Nearly all participants passed the exam and the customer satisfaction was high.

*“14 students signed up for the course, all of them were first-time candidates. Two of them dropped out before Christmas. The others completed the course, which is a real success. 11 students passed all exams while one student has one re-examination but will probably also complete the course successfully. These pass rates are high compared to other courses offered by SYNTRA” (D2\_03).*

*“The three teachers involved are all three of them candidate to lecture a similar group of Kurdish people. For them too, it has been an interesting learning experience” (D2\_03).*

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## **SECTION 4**

### **PRISON EDUCATION**

#### **1. Background information on prison education in Flanders**

##### *Features of context*

There are 34 penitentiaries in Belgium. 16 of them are located in the Flemish Community (Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), 3 in the Brussels-Capital Region and 15 in Wallonia (French-speaking part of Belgium). Nine penitentiaries have a capacity of 400 or more detainees.

Most of the prisons are remand prisons. Remand prisons are penal institutions where people are incarcerated in application of the Pre-trial Detention Act of 1990 (*De wet betreffende de voorlopige hechtenis*). There is a remand prison in nearly each major city in Flanders. About one out of four prisons is a convict prison, which are prisons for adults who are convicted by the court to an effective prison sentence. These convict prisons have different levels of security (Cosyns & Verellen, 2004: 90):

- open prisons ensure the security by an educational regime which is based on a voluntary accepted discipline and where common methods of coercion are applied only if necessary;
- in a semi-open prison detainees spend the night in secured cells and the daytime outside or at a workplace;
- closed prisons have a detention regime with high level of environmental security (escape-proof walls, bars, detection equipment, etc.).

The total capacity of all penitentiaries in Belgium is 8 254 places. However, during a short period in the year 2007 a population of 10 000 prisoners was exceeded. In that same year an average of 9 950 adults were deprived of their liberty, which was a historical maximum. In 2008 the average prison population was 9 804 (of which 9 353 male prisoners and 451 female prisoners). This being somewhat lower than the year before does not necessarily mean the turn of the chronic overcrowding that the Belgian prisons have been facing for some years now. As in many other European countries the chronic overcrowding of prisons is one of the major subjects of discussion among Belgian politicians and among policy makers with an interest for justice and law. In Belgium the overcrowding is mainly caused by the group of prisoners remanded in custody (Cosyns & Verellen, 2004; Deltenre & Maes, 2004). In fact, there has been an increasing use of pre-trial detention even though remand custody should only be used in exceptional circumstances. Especially during the 1980s and 1990s the evolution of the population of pre-trial detainees has known a striking increase. Statistics of the national Prison Administration show that in the year 2008 more than 3 500 adults were held in custody in a Belgian prison (FOD, Justitie

[http://www.statbel.fgov.be/fiGurEs/d352\\_nl.asp#1](http://www.statbel.fgov.be/fiGurEs/d352_nl.asp#1)).

#### *National policy documents on access to adult education in prisons*

Up to a few years ago, policy makers in Belgium paid little attention to adult education in prison. The national policy documents from before the turn of the millennium were focused on issues like labour in prison, release on parole, etc. In case norms did regulate aspects of the regime in prison (including education) they did not do so in a directive way. Sometimes adult education was referred to in official letters from ministers or their administration or in the rules and regulations made by the prisons themselves.

One of the most important policy documents on access to adult education in prisons in the Flemish Community of Belgium is, at this moment, the 'Strategic Plan on social help and services to inmates' (*Het strategisch plan hulp- en dienstverlening aan gedetineerden*). This plan was made in 2000 by the Flemish government. Its main objective is to improve the close cooperation between the different services funded by the Flemish Government in order to offer detainees qualitative social aid, education, vocational training, sports and leisure activities. At this moment, the plan has been implemented in eight prisons. In the near future this will be the case in all Flemish prisons. The plan has been evaluated for the first time in 2008.

*"The operational plan of the Flemish Community is still being implemented. The plan is scarcely out of the egg. Which means, concerning education, each prison in Flanders is still setting its own goals" (C1\_01).*

The strategic plan is a Flemish plan. A few years ago, in January 2005, the federal government passed a law concerning the legal position of detainees (*De basiswet betreffende het gevangeniswezen en de rechtspositie van de gedetineerden*). This law is considered to be a 'milestone' in the way sentences are executed in Belgian prisons (Tournel, 2009). It administers the European Prison Rules and regulates important basic principles like the right to health care of the same quality as in the free community, the right to – under some conditions – being transferred to another prison, and so on. Basically, this law determines the rights and duties of the detainees. It also states expressly that undergoing a prison sentence must also be a pathway to rehabilitation and reintegration in society. Of course, for this, education and training are important elements.

#### *Status and extent of adult education in prisons*

Today, a lot of prisons offer formal or non-formal adult education. Some have been doing so for a long time, for others it is fairly new.

Several educational institutions have been offering programmes to detainees for some time. This is the case for formal educational institutions, such as the centers for adult education and especially adult basic education, but just as well for non-formal educational institutions such as the VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service) and organizations for socio-cultural adult work (e.g. De Rode Antraciet). In some prisons voluntary organizations (e.g. Auxilia, De Vuurbloem) and volunteer civilian tutors help organizing educational programmes. Education and training for prisoners is not only in the hands of external organizations. The management of the prisons (prison governors) and the prison staff (restorative justice counselors, employees of the psycho-social team, warders, etc.) play, without a doubt, an important role in enhancing the educational participation among prisoners. This is not self-evident. Due to the overcrowding problem, the prison staff in a lot of prisons is overworked, and opportunities to provide services beyond the basic detention is often seriously compromised (Criste, 2004).

*“Today, the prison guards and officers are usually very cooperative when it comes to organizing educational activities. This was not always the case. In the beginning, some warders saw it as a burden or an unnecessary work load. Some of them even discouraged the prisoners to enroll. They said to prisoners: you do not need an education (...)” (C1\_01)*

*“The mentality has changed strongly over the last 15 years. Prisoners and staff members today realize the huge importance of prison education. It is important for the detainee and for his individual future, but also for society. To put it simply: broadening the mind of the prisoner reduces the chances of recidivism” (C1\_02).*

#### *Reduced fees*

Nearly all educational opportunities within the prison walls are free of charge. This however, does not mean there is no financial cost involved. For instance, prisoners that normally spend their time at a workplace, lose a part of their income when they opt for study instead of work. This loss of income is obviously a barrier to adult education for some prisoners. That is also the reason why many prisoners take courses on top of their jobs in prison.

#### *Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

The prison population rate in Belgium (per 100 000 of national population) is 93, while the average in Western Europe is over one hundred (Walmsley, 2008). However, since 1992, the Belgian prison population has known a sharp increase of 35%. More than four out of ten prisoners do not have the Belgian nationality. This rate of immigrants imprisoned is high compared to other European countries. This also means a lot of prisoners in Flanders do not have

Dutch as their mother tongue. As the supply of educational activities is usually in Dutch, an important part of the detainees hardly have opportunities to participate in educational programs. It also needs to be noted that, as many prisoners are in pre-trial custody, many among them do not know when they will be released. This, of course, has some impact on their willingness to start an educational process.

## 2. Case 1: Oudenaarde penitentiary

### 2.1 Background information

Features of the institution/information on the interviewees

- *Type of education:* adult education in prison
- *Type of institution:* penitentiary
- *Name of the institution:* Oudenaarde penitentiary
- *Interviewee 1:* prison governor (C1\_01)
- *Interviewee 2:* part-time education coordinator Oudenaarde penitentiary since 2005. The interviewee has worked as a teacher (Dutch and English language classes) in compulsory education and in adult basic education (D1\_02)

Oudenaarde penitentiary, situated in the province of East Flanders, is a medium-sized prison built in 1923. It is a closed prison (see before) with a capacity of 121 places. The exact prison population fluctuates. At the moment of the interviews (14<sup>th</sup> May 2009) 160 male adults were imprisoned. No female prisoners are incarcerated. 30 to 40 prisoners are pre-trial detainees. The effective prison sentence of the other, convicted, prisoners is usually quite long.

The prison population consists mainly of long-term violent, sex and drug offenders. Although the penal institution does not have a psychiatric unit, a lot of prisoners are to be considered offenders that are psychiatrically ill or people with serious personality problems. This however does not essentially determine the prison's atmosphere.

*"Oudenaarde penitentiary has the reputation being a small, peaceful and tranquil prison. Although the Oudenaarde penal institution has a lot of prisoners that face a long term sentence, there is little disturbance or rowdyism" (C1\_01).*

*"(...) Inmates are not just numbers here. In contrast with many other and bigger prisons, the contact with the prison staff is fairly informal and loosely defined here; decisions are taken more quickly, etc." (C1\_02).*

*Funding sources of the organization*

The Directorate-General Penitentiaries (D-G Penitentiaries) is responsible for a transparent and efficient execution of prison sentences. The D-G Penitentiaries is part of the Federal Public Service Justice. The Prison Administration is in other words in the hands of a federal ministry. The budget of the Directorate-General Penitentiaries represented, in 2000, approximately a quarter of the global budget of the Federal Public Service Justice. The budget of D-G Penitentiaries has grown steadily over the last decade.

Following the institutional reforms during the 1980s, all aspects relating to ‘forensic welfare’ (i.e. social aid to offenders, victims and their family) are the exclusive responsibility of the regional authorities (in this case: the Flemish Community). One could say that although the Belgian justice system is mainly the responsibility of the federal government, the wellbeing of the prisoners and their rights to access all services available are the responsibility of the regional authorities. The determination of law and policy being shared by the federal government and the regional communities and their authorities, sometimes leads to problems (Snacken et al., 2004).

*“There is a lot of tension between those different policy making authorities and this is certainly reflected in the Belgian prison system. Because different authorities are responsible, actions and policy making sometimes misses coherence” (C1\_01).*

*“It is not unfair to say that before 2000 there was no intense support for education in Belgian prisons. For the federal government it was a side issue” (C1\_02).*

Since 2000, a collaboration was established with the local centre for adult basic education in Oudenaarde<sup>6</sup>, funded by the Flemish public authorities.

*Background data to profile target groups for access strategies*

Most of the prisoners missed education during their childhood years or received some kind of special education. It is clear they are not used to perform in a school like context.

*“Prisoners, especially long-term prisoners, are not easy to deal with. They do not necessarily have a low IQ, although we notice quite a difference in the level of intelligence and in the attitude of the enrolled prisoners” (C1\_01).*

As a consequence, it takes a specific educational approach to attract prisoners to the training courses and keep them motivated for lifelong learning.

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<sup>6</sup> This centre is now part of a consortium for formal adult education (a consortium is a close collaboration between centers for adult education and adult basic education within a specific region). Today, there are 12 education coordinators for prison education working in the 13 consortia in the Flemish Community. One consortium does not have such a coordinator because there is no prison in that region.

*“We try to apply tailor-made didactical approaches in the classes and try to avoid any emphasis on cramming for an examination. The classes should meet the needs of the learners. This takes an effective use of classroom differentiation” (C1\_02) .*

#### *Access strategies*

Most of the educational opportunities are open to all prisoners. This is certainly so for all types of non-formal educational activities such as music classes, language classes (French, Spanish, English), IT classes, yoga, etc.

Since 1994, Oudenaarde penitentiary has a tradition in certificate-oriented education (see model of practice). To be eligible for this type of formal adult education, candidates must speak Dutch and be motivated. Furthermore it is important the educational process can be completed at the latest by the end of the prisoner’s time in prison.

## **2.2 The access of adults to adult education in prison**

### *Background features of the prison/background to prison education*

Due to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century infrastructure and the overcrowding, there is not much place in the Oudenaarde penitentiary building to organize education and create a class room environment.

Still, over the years, several (smaller) class rooms and one (bigger) polyvalent room were built and renovated in the prison building. Because of the success of the Education Project (see model of practice) an extra class room was built in the chapel last year.

The prison has one fully equipped computer room for IT-courses. That room is equipped with new computers (without Internet access) and offers the opportunity to test the detainees’ IT skills and digital literacy.

*“We have 18 new computers in the computer room. Ten of them were bought with financial support from the Flemish government to offer prison-based adult basic education. The other eight computers were sponsored by an Internet company in order to help bridging the digital gap in society in general and in prisons in particular” (C1\_02).*

There is also a small library in the prison, although both interviewees agree it is not a very good one. At this moment the prison staff is making an effort to improve the library (more books, etc.).

### *Education currently available in prison*

As mentioned earlier, several types of training courses are on offer within the Oudenaarde prison walls: diploma-oriented courses, non-formal educational activities and general cultural activities. Over 15 years ago, the prison management made the choice to invest in adult education (Bosmans, 2007).



*Continuity of education*

For prison education to be successful, timing is a very important matter. Both interviewees indicate that adults who are just being imprisoned are usually not immediately ready to take a course. The long-term prisoners usually need some time of what the prison governor calls *“penitentiary rest and silence”* (C1\_01). After this period, prisoners are more easily motivated to study again. This is usually halfway through their sentence.

For the prison staff, it is important that each educational process can be completed not later than by the end of the sentence, because detainees do not tend to continue and complete a course or study once they are released.

*“One of our aims is to make sure adults keep on learning outside the prison walls. But we must not fool ourselves: this is usually not the case. That is also the reason why prisons with a lot of juveniles and pre-trial detainees have difficulties in offering educational activities (...) adults could be leaving the prison long before a successful completion of the educational process. And for that same reason, these prisoners are less interested”* (C1\_01).

A powerful tool for learner motivation is the event during which the diplomas and certificates are handed out. The education coordinator (C1\_02) states this public moment usually boosts the students' self esteem and *“gives them the feeling they have achieved something”*.

*Distance education*

Apart from the classes, the prison also offers supervised individual study opportunities. The Oudenaarde penitentiary offers this to give detainees the opportunity to gather information, books, etc. The supervised individual study can take up to a maximum of three hours a week, for four months (16 weeks). For the prisoners who take general subjects, a supervised individual study is offered during one to two hours a week.

The combination of regular classes and individual study opportunities can be seen as a hybrid or blended course of study. However, this does not necessarily expand access to adult education in prison.

*“We experience that for most of the students individual study is much harder than just attending a course. They have little experience in individual study”* (C1\_02).

Distance education over the Internet is not allowed, but distance education through regular mail is allowed.

### *Support services in prison*

Adult education in the Oudenaarde penitentiary is supported in many ways. The education coordinator, the prison governor and prison staff, the psycho-social aid team, etc. all work together to help the detainees in their educational process.

Students often find a mentor among the other detainees or become a mentor to others. The prison staff however does not recruit mentors in an active way.

*“In the past, prisoners that had succeeded in their formal education were asked to facilitate and support the learning process of other prisoners that just started a course. It was their job to motivate and tutor those other prisoners. The system of mentorship has been put to a stop recently, because there are more classes now and the teachers themselves stand out more as mentors than ever before” (C1\_02).*

### *Prisoner profiles*

The reasons and motives why prisoners start studying during their time in prison varies considerably. Most of them opt for a study because of personal reasons. They want to work on their personal development; they want to spend their time in prison in a useful way or want to prepare themselves for the moment when they will be released. Other reasons besides the personal ones are not mentioned by the interviewees.

When it comes to education, a lot of prisoners have the impression they missed their chance when they were young.

*“Adult education is very important for a lot of prisoners. It is a way to ensure themselves a better future. People being imprisoned for a long time often lose nearly all the friends and social contacts they had when they were free” (C1\_01).*

Regarding the access to adult education in prison, the hierarchy in the prison population is clearly of much importance too.

*“If some “informal leaders” among the prisoners agree it is cool to take a course, more prisoners will be motivated to do so. If not, many prisoners won’t be firm enough in their belief to oppose to that” (C1\_02).*

### *Teachers in prison*

Until the beginning of the 1990s, courses were mostly taught by teachers with experience in compulsory education. Teaching prisoners was in fact volunteer work for them.

*“You must realize those teachers were not easy to find. Most of them came to the prison in their spare time. They were not paid a lot for providing education to prisoners. Because of*

*this, there were no specific admission criteria and perhaps, in some cases, this might have led to a lack of pedagogical underpinning” (C1\_02).*

Since 2005 the prison uses admission criteria and standards for teachers in formal adult education. All teachers must have taken a teacher’s education and have a certificate or diploma to prove this. This is a way for the prison to ensure the teachers have the required attitudes, knowledge and skills.

#### *Future directions*

According to the interviewed prison governor it is important to take a look at education and training from the point of view of the detainee. In contrast with a more institutional point of view that would focus in the first place on measuring the general output of adult education, an individual ‘detention plan’ could set out what the prisoner wants to do during his sentence.

*“My dream is an individual ‘detention plan’ for every detainee in Flanders. In this plan the detainee, the prison governor, the Flemish Community and the court of law specify what the prisoner will do during his time of sentence. This plan includes adult education. If all prisoners have such a plan, a more coherent provision of educational opportunities spread over all prisons will follow logically” (C1\_01).*

### 2.3 Models of practice

#### Education Project (Het onderwijsproject)

##### *Objectives of practice*

The Education Project (Het onderwijsproject) in the Oudenaarde prison offers detainees the chance to guided study in order to take an exam and, in some cases, obtain a degree from the Central state examination committee.

There are three main learning pathways: (1) Personal care (conflict resolution skills, self-awareness programs, parenting skills, coping with bereavement, life skills, coping with addiction, etc.), (2) Office clerk and (3) Kitchen and cooking. All three of these courses correspond with a level of secondary vocational education or higher vocational education (Hoger beroepsonderwijs – HBO). To enter secondary education a certificate of elementary education is required.

The formal education in the project is organized in modules. A typical learning pathway consists of different short modules that take about six months each. This has been so since the start of the project, although due to current reforms in adult education and adult basic education in Flanders the completion of a module takes more hours of class now than it used to take.

The order of the modules is determined in advance. The adult learners start off with some general subjects (e.g. mathematics, geography, history) and continue with more specialized courses (e.g. office clerk). Each successfully completed module results in a modular certificate (deelcertificaat).

The maximum number of students per class is 10 when the course takes place in one of the smaller class rooms. In the bigger polyvalent room the maximum number is 12 to 14.

*“Sometimes the size of the class rooms is a problem. For the business management training for instance, 31 prisoners enrolled. In that particular case the students were divided into two groups. The advantage of this was that both groups could learn at different levels and speeds” (C1\_02)*

##### *Target groups*

The project was and still is open for all prisoners. The prison performs a standard procedure to open access for all prisoners. There is even the possibility to arrange a transfer when a detainee wants to take a course but is imprisoned in another penal institution. Transferring prisoners to the Oudenaarde penitentiary is actually one of the most important consequences of this project. Every six months, four to five prisoners are transferred to Oudenaarde so that they can enroll for diploma-oriented education.

First of all, if the inmate that wants to enroll for a course is imprisoned in some other prison,

there has to be an agreement between that prison and the Oudenaarde penitentiary to exchange prisoners. Secondly, the candidate must write a letter with his motivation for wanting to take the course. This letter is screened by the education coordinator. By means of this screening procedure, the prison verifies if no other motives play a role in the request for transfer. Besides that, data is gathered on what might be described as the educational history of the prisoner and his mother tongue. Finally, if the prisoner is given access to the Education Project in the Oudenaarde penal institution he enters into an agreement. This means he agrees to sign a study agreement.

#### *Funding sources*

The Education Project is funded by a Social Fund (by the Federal government). This is also the case for formal adult education in other prisons.

#### *History/background of this model*

The Oudenaarde penitentiary has been a pioneer in Flanders concerning diploma-oriented adult education. At the very beginning, in 1993, there were some informal contacts between the former prison governor, some institutions offering formal adult education and the Central state examination committee. These contacts led to the Education Project as we know it now.

The exam pass rates were low at the beginning. Besides there were a lot of drop-outs. But the pass rates increased over the years as well as the amount of inmates that enrolled for one or more modules. There has been an evolution of 20 to 30 registered students per module more than ten years ago to sometimes over 45 students per module now. The drop-out rates however did not decrease. The education coordinator explains:

*“Counting the absolute numbers is kind of misleading because the amount of students has certainly increased. Therefore it is logical that more students drop out (...) still we face a drop-out rate that is fairly high compared to formal adult education outside prison. In a prison there are a lot of reasons why adults drop out of class” (C1\_02).*

#### *Number of participants*

Currently, 61 prisoners are taking one or more formal educational courses. Over the last year, at least 105 different prisoners attended at least one class of at least one hour.

#### *Location*

All educational activities take place within the Oudenaarde prison. Some activities involve group work in one of the class rooms while other activities take place in the library or in the polyvalent room.

#### *Perceived strengths and weaknesses*

The transfer of inmates to Oudenaarde prison in order to be able to study has had some side-effects in the past. Sometimes the transfer influenced the educational motivation. In some cases prisoners in fact wanted to switch prison without really wanting to take a course.

*“Over the last years there has certainly been a decline of prisoners entering with a false motivation. The fact that they have to sign a study agreement surely had some impact on that. Detainees take their study more seriously now” (C1\_02).*

One of the barriers hindering the access to formal adult education in prison and therefore one of the weaknesses of this model is the financial barrier.

*“(…) sometimes there is a certain “competition” between the courses and the other activities such as paid work, leisure, and so on. Prisoners have to choose explicitly for an educational program. This is a hard choice to make, because detainees tend to make more money when they work in one of the prison’s workshops than they do attending a class. Although the adult learners receive a financial encouragement - a course allowance - when enrolling for a class, this never exceeds the wage of a shop-floor worker in prison (C1\_01).*

Financial barriers not only have an important impact on the demand side of the model, they also play an important role on the supply side of the model. According to the interviewed prison governor, the development and provision of education in prisons in general is still inadequate. Both interviewees argue that the institutions for both formal and non-formal adult education should pay more attention to the prison population. Today, the amount of learning opportunities largely depends on the institutions’ goodwill. Working in prisons should become more attractive, they say. The institutions should be invited, receive incentives and, if necessary, be obliged to work for detainees.

*“One clear barrier on the side of the educational institutions is: every program they offer in prison is twice as expensive as an outside prison program. Offering education in prison takes a lot of time, literally, (...) teachers have to wait a lot, each door in prison is a closed door, they have to win the confidence of their students, etc. Offering education and training in a prison stands for quite an investment. Usually institutions do not have a budget for this. The return on investment is, however, threefold. First of all, the institutions help the prisoners to become active citizens. Secondly, they help to reduce the sentence of well-behaving prisoners. Thirdly, offering education and training to detainees increases post release employment and helps released offenders to avoid repeating their behavior in the future” (C1\_01).*

As noted earlier, the lack of adequate facilities (e.g. communal areas) is another aspect that

hinders the expansion of this model.

*Priority needs for expansion of the model/service*

The 'Strategic Plan on social help and services to inmates' (Het Strategisch plan hulp- en dienstverlening aan gedetineerden) (see above) could be seen as the first step of the expansion of this model to other prisons. Part of the implementation process of the Strategic Plan was the start of a series of Pilot Education Projects in several Belgian prisons.

*"In contrast with most of the other prisons in Belgium, education was already strongly embedded in our prison system at the start of the (new) millennium. As a result of the new Pilot Education Project, Oudenaarde penitentiary could now employ a part-time education coordinator. This happened in the year 2005" (C1\_02).*

*Methods of feedback, evaluation*

The project is often (re-)evaluated. The output of the project is without any doubt a success. In the first 14 years of the project (until March of 2008), 35 certificates and 418 partial certificates have been granted.

*Perception regarding the impact of the recession on this model*

According to the interviewees the recession has little direct impact on this model. However, the way politicians and policy makers react to the economic recession might have an indirect impact.

*"On the one hand society wants to punish people for their offence, and right-wing and nationalistic political parties reflect that vision more than ever before, while on the other hand people want to offer detainees education and training as a means to ensure them a better future once they get out of prison. But what do we see in the meantime? As prison overcrowding is a major political issue these days, one can only hear the public cry for more punishment and more prisons. In times of economic recession, this can only be considered an expensive and irrational choice. Would it not be more logical to invest in education and training first?" (C1\_01).*

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## SECTION 5

### GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS

#### 1. Background information

*Adult education in the Flemish community: structure, responsibility and budget*

Belgium is a federal state made up of territorial regions and linguistic communities (the Flemish, French and German speaking communities). Each region/community has some competences for self-government. As a result, they all have their own institutions, traditions and influences. The Flemish Community carries responsibility for almost all educational matters.

Ever since the turn of the century, the Flemish government has started a large-scale structural reform project called 'Improved Administrative Policy' (*Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid*) which now has been largely completed. This reform has led to improved administrative management. The main changes the Flemish public administration have undergone are: a new division of tasks between administrative and ministerial offices; a remodelling of the Flemish competences into 13 homogeneous policy domains or areas built on the same internal structure; new instruments and tasks for policy evaluation.

Formal and (especially) non-formal adult education are to be situated in different policy domains. This means that different ministers, departments and agencies are competent for different policy matters concerning adult education. A lot of matters cut across at least two policy domains. This implies that, concerning lifelong learning in general, decisions must be taken in mutual agreement between two or more ministers.

This table shows the policy domains covering all types of adult learning.

Policy domain	General description of educational activities in this policy domain	Type of education (using SP5 definitions)
Education and training	Compulsory education, diploma-oriented adult education	Formal education (compulsory and pos-compulsory)
Work and social economy	Vocational adult education, entrepreneurial training	Non-formal education
Culture, Youth, Media and sports	Civil society, socio-cultural activities	Non-formal education Informal learning
Welfare, care and family	Social work, community development	Non-formal education Informal learning
Agriculture and fishing	Training in agriculture	Formal education

Adult education is not simply a state matter. It is in fact mainly a private matter, encompassing predominantly private initiatives, although the bulk of the cost is borne by the public authorities. When we take a look at the budget for formal adult education, this is not more than 3.2% (nearly 3 million euro) of the overall budget for education and training. When part-time art education is included (1.8 million euro) this becomes 5.3%. The overall Flemish budget for education and training is 9,242,702,000 euro (according to the policy credits 2008) or a share of 38.84 per cent of the general Flemish budget.

It is hard to express non-formal adult education in budgetary terms, because it depends on the exact definition of non-formal education and also because the budget figures are spread over different policy domains and budgets.

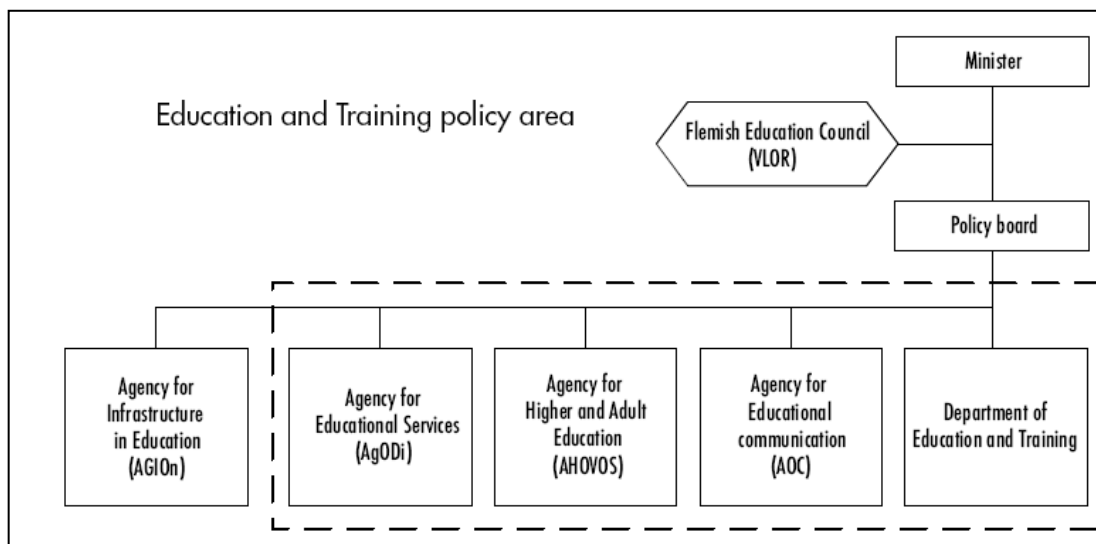
#### *The internal structure of the policy domains*

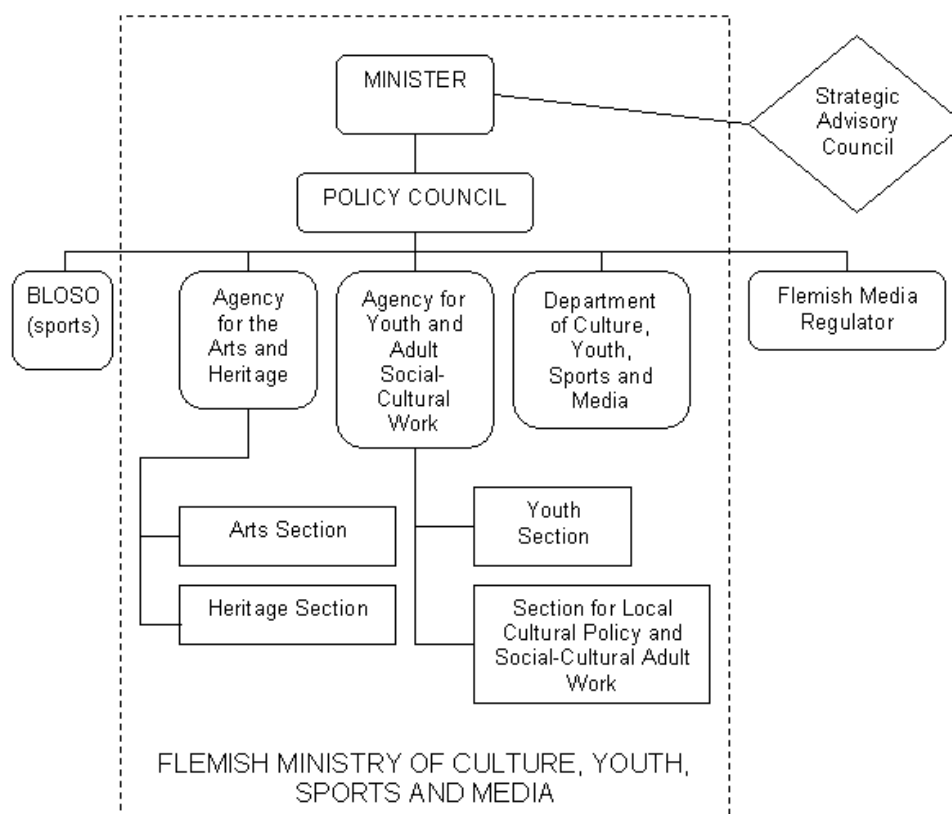
As already mentioned, since the structural reform of the Flemish authorities, each policy domain has the same internal structure. All policy domains are made up of several autonomous bodies:

- The minister. He or she is ultimately responsible for the policy domain. Working together with a small group of advisors, he or she directs policy measures;
- A policy council. This is where responsible politicians (the minister and employees of his ministerial office) and senior state officials meet;
- Departments. These bodies lend support and offer advice on policy-making and monitoring. They, in fact, design – together with the minister and his office – the public policy;
- Agencies. Agencies implement the policy decisions taken.

The departments as well as the agencies work autonomously and are managed by a senior civil servant.

We offer an overview of the structure of the two most important policy domains for adult education. The first figure shows the structure of the policy domain of Education and Training, the second one comprises the structure of the policy domain Culture, Youth, Sports and Media.





## 2. Translated interview 1

### *The Flemish policy for non-formal adult education in the policy domain of Culture, Youth, media and Sports*

Most of the non-formal adult education in the policy area of Culture, Youth, Media and Sports can be interpreted as popular education or socio-cultural work for adults. Popular adult education and socio-cultural work for adult (or: socio-cultural adult work) are umbrella terms for activities during which adult participants enlarge their knowledge, insights and skills. The learning process is life-centred (in order to increase personal development) but also society-oriented (functioning in society). Because of this wide perspective, the term 'life wide learning' is also used.

This line of work does not include school education (formal education) and vocational training for adults. Participants do not get a diploma. Some non-formal adult education institutions (but not all of them) offer certificates of learning or sometimes a proof of competence.

Marijke Verdoodt is the adjunct director of the department of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media of the Flemish ministry of culture, Youth, Sports and Media. She is responsible for policy matters (supporting and advising) such as art education for adults, non-formal education for adults, etc.

*Is there a national and/or government strategy for:*

- *social inclusion;*
- *access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups;*
- *lifelong learning;*
- *literacy;*
- *the non-formal education sector.*

I will take the first two together: social inclusion and educationally disadvantaged groups. In our policy in past years we have focused strongly on social inclusion and disadvantaged groups by emphasising participation as an enormously important point for consideration. Participation in three main areas: increasing breadth, depth and numbers. Firstly, increasing the number of people and ensuring that the people who participate learn in an enriching and more profound manner, and secondly, ensuring that not just the number of people, but also the diversity of the people who take part goes up. In this sense, a large number of strategic measures are being taken

to ensure precisely this social inclusion. At the start of 2008 the so-called participation decree<sup>7</sup> was approved. It has brought together all measures to do with participation – the participation of people in culture, youth work and sport – within a single decree and a single set of regulations. That is why with us you have subsidies at the level of organizations, in other words oriented towards the structural functioning of specific institutions which are concerned with these areas, as well as project-based support. This latter type of support also means supporting projects which specifically respond to this need for social inclusion. In other words, they are aimed at groups which are not inherently inclined to participate. For instance, low-threshold non-formal education may also be included as an approach around which both institutions and projects are subsidised. So these are the means by which I address these educationally disadvantaged groups. Then we come to literacy. A very wide-ranging approach is taken to literacy within the Culture, Sport and Media policy domains. The points of focus are both being literate on a cultural level, in the sense of the arts and the heritage, but equally being able to cope with the everyday reality in which we live. On the part of the government, specific efforts are also being made for people who have a low level of literacy in some particular respect. For example, there is reading promotion, where there is a subsidy line which supports projects. Obviously, that is just one aspect of literacy, which is more to do with cultural literacy: being able to read and to enjoy literature. In socio-cultural work for adults there are a great many organizations which are concerned with literacy in another way: training institutions, *Vormingplus* training centres, and so on. Their work is also to do with literacy, of course. They are active in that area, day in and day out. For example, you've got organizations such as *Ambrosia's Tafel*, an organization for multimedia education, which take a broad approach to literacy. The focus there is multimedia literacy. This is also supported by youth work. All of that lies within our own policy domains of Culture, Youth, Media and Sport.

*When you are talking about the strategy for raising literacy, do you regard the general framework as being the Strategic Plan on increasing Literacy (Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid Verhogen)?*

Yes, we support the Flemish government's Strategic Plan on Increasing Literacy just as we do other policy domains such as Education and Training, Work and numerous other relevant policy domains.

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<sup>7</sup> The full name of this decree is: 'Decreet houdende flankerende en stimulerende maatregelen ter bevordering van de participatie in cultuur, jeugdwerk en sport' (*Decree on stimulating and flanked measures to increase participation in Culture, Youth work and Sports*).

At Flemish policy level, and this is important, there is also the overarching framework for lifelong and life wide learning. This involves interdepartmental cooperation on the part of us and Education and Training and Work. We sit down with different policy domains in order to define numerous actions and objectives at the strategic and operational levels relating to lifelong and life wide learning. Naturally literacy also ties in with this. We are also setting a partnership in motion in this area, between the *Vormingplus* training centres (Training-plus centres) and the centres for adult basic education. Locus, the policy research centre for local cultural policy, will also be supporting a number of projects which specifically focus on information literacy and citizenship. Firstly, they are going to be organising a number of projects in libraries, which have already worked with centres for adult basic education in this area. Secondly, they are also going to be developing a kind of methodology which they can then spread to other sectors or domains. So this is another example of how the policy domain of Culture is working with Education. Such activities are based in the overarching cooperation between education, training and work, i.e. the interface between education, training and work.

Non-formal education is largely addressed by us in the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Young People and Adults. The whole of the Agency is occupied with it. Socio-cultural work in Flanders is very strongly based on the idea of non-formal education. Work is also being done on non-formal education at Arts and Heritage. When you think of the educational impact of arts institutions, museums and heritage organizations, you can see that these too are engaged in non-formal education. Youth work is also heavily involved in non-formal education. For youth work, and that is perhaps not unimportant in a European context, the upper age limit is 30.

Is there a position of responsibility in your government department, specifically to develop and monitor implementation on these issues:

- social inclusion;
- access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups;
- lifelong learning;
- literacy;
- the non-formal education sector.

*In other words, if progress is not made in these areas who takes responsibility to drive things forward?*

Evaluation and monitoring remain a challenge for the government. Obviously, all agencies are engaged in it. Assessments are conducted to ascertain whether the regulations are correctly

applied in practice. Checks are also made to ensure that the policy is being interpreted accurately.

*Are there structures for dialogue and a common strategy on any of these areas, between different government departments? How can this dialogue be improved?*

Naturally a transfer of knowledge also needs to be created, from policy preparation to policy advice. Moreover, an attempt is being made within our own policy domain, and interdepartmentally too, of course, to link together the efforts that are made and set them in a larger and wider framework. This is certainly the case with lifelong learning. For the subject of lifelong learning, there is an interdepartmental steering group which ensures policy coordination. In short, in the areas of lifelong learning, literacy, non-formal education, and so on, there is definitely harmonisation between the different policy domains. This is also the case as regards social inclusion and educationally disadvantaged groups. Regarding poverty, for example, there is also intersect oral dialogue.

*What percentage of your government department budget goes on adult education: a) formal education, b) non-formal education?*

That's a very difficult question. It depends on your definitions. The things that are supported at the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Young People and Adults are non-formal education in any case. For lifelong learning, there is a specific budget for the interdepartmental work I have just been talking about.

For formal adult education: the project on Strategic Training and Education Policy at the Department of Education and Training manages a budget specifically intended for policy preparation and policy implementation at the interface of Education and Training and Work. So you can certainly find out from the Department of Education what budget is specifically devoted to this area every year (*cf. other interview*).

Regarding social inclusion and educationally disadvantaged groups, I would have to look at the participation decree, as I was just saying, to find out how much money is earmarked for that area.

*Let's talk about future plans. What, in your opinion, are your government department's priority issues to improve access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation?*

It's a very difficult time right now, because we're just coming up to the transition from one government term to the next. It's very hard for us to assess that.

*What changes do you hope will be achieved in 5 years time to promote access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation?*



The budget for Culture, Youth and Sport increased during the last term of government, and in view of the economic and financial crisis we are all in today it is unlikely that the budget will go up further. But how the Minister for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media is going to spend that budget is unknown at present.

However, from within the government, in the advice we pass on to the new Minister for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media we can certainly say various things about the specific themes that you have just mentioned, and we will definitely be working to ensure that enough money is spent on them.

*Please comment on measures taken by the national government to support adult learning outside the major cities in your country.*

The Flemish government does not explicitly differentiate between urban and rural initiatives. However, this distinction is reflected in some measures. One example is the regional *volkshogescholen* (folk high schools) also known as the *Vormingplus* centres (Training-plus centres). These 13 organizations are widely scattered. They have been made responsible by the Flemish government for getting the message across to the entire population in their region regarding non-formal education. It's up to each *volkshogeschool* in each region to ensure that it is addressing both the urban and the rural population.

*Does your government ministry provide any support for individuals with specific responsibility for developing adult education services at a local or regional level, i.e., Adult Education Organizers?*

There's the policy of the cities and municipalities themselves. Quite a few cities and municipalities are working on an education policy. The central question then is who will subsidise what and who gets a say about what. This is a subject of debate.

Is there a central committee in your government department with specific responsibility for:

- social inclusion;
- access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups;
- lifelong learning;
- literacy;
- the non-formal education sector.

There is the interdepartmental steering group which specifically works on lifelong and life wide learning. Literacy also partly falls within its remit.

Within our own policy domains there are various working groups for subthemes. There is a specific working group occupied with monitoring the qualification structure. There is a working

group specifically on the recognition of acquired skills. For each theme, there is a working group or a committee which works either on an ad hoc basis or more systematically.

How does this work? You have people working on policy preparation. For example, I myself work on all aspects of the relationship between culture and education. Within the agencies there are then the application administrators, who are responsible for the payment of subsidies. They are also engaged in that.

Then there are the policy research centres, which are also significant. As the government we subsidise organizations and projects, but also the various policy research centres which of course have to support the organizations in the sector itself in terms of practice development, practice support, communication and so on. Research is also conducted into these different areas.

*So there is not one central committee in your government department with specific responsibility for social inclusion, access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups, lifelong learning, literacy, the non-formal education sector?*

There is a single Participation team, but within the different entities of course. There is policy preparation, at the department where I work, and that also involves my colleagues from the Interculturalisation Knowledge Hub (*Kennisknooppunt Interculturalisering*), who are specifically working with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There is also someone involved who is working on the poverty issue, on social inclusion in fact. Within the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work with Youth and Adults there is a group of people who specifically manage the funds or ensure that they reach the right destination.

*Are there representatives from the at risk target groups involved in these agencies, committees, etc.?*

At the policy preparation level we get the chance – which I greatly welcome and appreciate – to talk to people from the field. It's not always easy. Within the agencies, visits are conducted within the sectors, and organizations are regularly visited. When we are drawing up advice, we often try to involve the target groups themselves, too. We try to involve them in study days and give them a chance to speak. Obviously, when we set up a working group or something similar on a specific theme, we definitely make sure that we involve the target groups. But of course there is no structural dialogue with people in poverty themselves, with the actual target group itself. Such dialogue always takes place via the institutions in which they are brought together.

*If progress is not made in these areas that I mentioned before who takes responsibility to drive things forward?*

As a government body you can point out if insufficient progress is being made on certain points, and then you try to provide extra support there. But of course it is always the minister and the legislature that decide whether or not something will be done. Even so, everyone – all the different people working in this area – has to continually ask whether they are involving the right people, ask questions such as ‘Are we listening to the right voices and how can we improve on that in the future?’ Everyone is evaluated at the end of their working year, and that evaluation relates to results-centred objectives.

Another question, of course, is strategic or policy objectives and whether these are attained. But the operational translation of what the minister decides in his policy is ultimately the official guideline.

*Does your government ministry provide any support for individuals with specific responsibility for developing adult education services at a local or provincial level? Is there a dialogue between the different policy levels (Belgium, Flanders, provinces, cities)?*

We keep our finger on the pulse via the policy research centres, for instance. Locus for example, the policy research centre for local cultural policy, has a very close rapport with local cultural policy in general at municipal and urban level.

At provincial level, I have to admit that that is a policy level with which I have not always engaged in much dialogue, so I can’t give a very detailed picture in my answer. What I can say is that a partner such as the VVSG (*Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten* - Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities) is definitely involved and consulted as much as possible. Even if study days and so on are being organized, aldermen for Culture and Youth are involved.

*Can you give an example of collaboration between the Flemish policy level and the local or provincial level?*

The Flemish Decree on Local Cultural Policy subsidises and even obliges local authorities to have a library. In addition to this obligation, they can also gain funds to appoint a cultural policy coordinator who then draws up a cultural policy plan for the municipality. For such a cultural policy plan, contact is ideally also sought with sectors such as Education and Work, and a great deal of attention is also paid to lifelong learning.

Thus the Flemish government subsidises the compilation of this cultural policy plan via the cultural policy coordinator, but as to what eventually goes into the plan, we can raise awareness but as a government we don’t impose anything.

*How would you compare the status and development of the non-formal education sector compared with 5 years ago? Has it expanded or increased over the last 5 years? Why?*

Again, that is a very difficult question. But to talk about an increase or decrease you need to have figures to take as your basis, and that is a problem at the moment. Annual reports have been published by the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work with Youth and Adults for a long time, so you can examine the statistics there. Of course it's also fair to say that subjects such as cultural education or non-formal education can be interpreted more widely and hence also fall within the scope of the Agency for Arts and Heritage. Workshops in art institutions or museums are also educational activities, non-formal activities which take place and require an investment of time and manpower.

But I do think that non-formal education is on the increase. I believe that more and more actors are aware of the need for education or for support for people in tackling cultural skills. By this I mean the way in which they deal with the culture, in the broad sense of the word, which they confront day after day. That's true even if I only take as my basis the fact that the budget for the policy domain of Culture in general is exponentially pointing to an increase in the number of activities for non-formal education.

*What is the main cause of this expansion? Another definition of non-formal education, more policy attention for it or simply more budget?*

I believe the cause lies in the interaction between these factors. Why does a government decide to increase the budget? A Minister of Sport, Youth and Culture has to be able to come up with arguments for such a budget increase within the Flemish government. He has to take a social reality as his basis for doing so. Thus a true interaction arises.

Organizations probably have their own sense of the areas in which demand is increasing. If the government responds to this, if the resources are available of course, and if a minister can take responsibility and release funds, provision will obviously also expand.

*What changes do you realistically expect will be achieved in 5 years time to promote access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation?*

- reserved places yes or no;
- free childcare;
- access officers in each third level institution;
- outreach strategies for each community.

The participation-based approach behind Flemish policy in recent years has obviously included the objective of reaching these underrepresented groups more and more. Past ministers of Culture, Youth and Sport have made this into a rallying-cry for increasing participation. In other words, over the past ten years I believe that considerable efforts have been made with regard to

participation in order to reach relatively inaccessible target groups more and more. The participation decree has been the apotheosis of this, in a manner of speaking, and has led to the reinforcement of participation being enshrined in the regulations. Of course the intense focus on participation is also related to the political and ideological background of the minister in question. *What, in your opinion, are your government department's priority issues to improve access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation?*

Interculturalisation is important. Little by little, under the influence of the regulations, organizations are becoming increasingly active in interculturalisation. This is also contributed to by social realities. The typical cross-section of society has become more intercultural. I believe this simply has to be taken into account. It can only increase further in the future. So there is this societal and social context. Organizations are going to be compelled to deal with it, so it is up to the government to encourage or support them in this by means of the right channels and the right instruments.

*What are the main obstacles to establishing a mechanism for the recognition of prior non-formal learning and work experience in order to open access for adults to the education system? How can these obstacles, in your view, be overcome?*

One obstacle is that, where non-formal education is concerned, you are in a field where a great many diverse organizations are occupied. Some organizations work with an open range of services and target adults who participate in certain forms of training on the basis of their own interest. There are also organizations, for instance within the youth work sector, who are really oriented towards specific target groups within an urban context who work together on building up their competencies. For these younger people, it is far more important to identify their competencies than it is for other people who engage in training in their free time and who have plenty of other diplomas in any case and so don't need proof of acquired competencies to the same extent. I don't confine this to young people in an urban setting – it's also true of recent immigrants.

*Why is recognition of prior learning more important for young people and recent immigrants? Is it because they still need to find their way into the labour market?*

Yes. Because they need to find their way into the labour market. But I very much want to emphasise that within our policy domain the recognition of acquired competencies need not take place exclusively for the sake of access to the labour market or education. It is equally important for people's personal development. I believe that it is mainly up to individuals, who vary enormously, to ensure that their own development reflects their own needs. This may be a

matter of personal development or of finding a job or a suitable educational course. But I believe that as the government we have to ensure that they have the opportunity to make the most of those competencies that they have acquired in non-formal education, whether within a formative assessment or summative assessment approach with regard to work and education.

There is currently a project in progress relating to the recognition of competencies acquired via non-formal education. In it, an attempt is being made to somehow identify and recognise non-formal competencies and experiences which have been accumulated within subsidised or unsubsidised socio-cultural work for young people or adults. When the project is over we will have to see how this is actually picked up on by the people themselves.

For the approach to the recognition of acquired competencies by the Flemish government, it is also important to talk to those responsible for other policy domains, such as Education and Training, Work, and so on, in order to ensure that it is possible to actually make use in those areas of the competencies acquired via non-formal education. The qualification structure is an important instrument for this.

*What plans need to be developed for further flexibility of accreditation systems by the State?*

Accreditation needs to be more flexible because non-formal adult education has its own specific character. Of course this is a very difficult question. Accreditation is about offering guarantees regarding the competencies a person has, based on the testing of those competencies. Accreditation is no easy matter within non-formal educational sectors, and so far the government has not sought to impose it.

Within socio-cultural work for young people, there are various forms of accreditation. These involve a kind of certificate which is awarded to young people who have attended training, for instance as an activity leader, etc. But there is no testing at all for these certificates. The government cannot guarantee that a test has been administered, because this is something that is left to the organizations themselves. However, once someone wants to start using their competencies in a work context or an educational context, they need to be able to tell the institution in question that the certificate actually means something – that it's not just a plastic-coated piece of paper. How an assessment of competencies in non-formal education should be done, who can do it and where, is another question. More flexibility is certainly called for, because you're also dealing with a completely different study system in the non-formal educational sector: the training is given in a completely different way, and it calls for different testing or assessment methods. But provided you can ensure that these are as valid as those used in mainstream education, much is possible.

*What, in your opinion, are your government department's priority issues to improve access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation?*

There are many priorities. Better advice provision, for each of these specific target groups, is a priority. I believe that organizations need to be made even more aware of the need to appeal to underrepresented target groups.

There are also numerous good practices, but these often remain within individual organizations. I believe that the challenge is ultimately to start implementing these in a structural fashion and to spread them throughout Flanders. It is important for expertise to be exchanged and for the right people to be brought together so that a snowball effect is set in motion. The knowledge or expertise that is accumulated is often not shared sufficiently, and not even pursued further on a systematic basis within organizations. Often it is also a question of being able to liberate the time, resources and people to do so.

In the government, dialogue is also needed to ensure better advice provision. It is also a priority to enter into the right partnerships on the basis of this, to ensure the right forms of cooperation and to build new partnerships with the actors who can ensure that better advice provision happens.

*Are reserved places a means to attract underrepresented groups?*

Reserved places or the imposition of quotas for specific target groups, a discount card...any tool for ensuring better advice provision needs to be supervised properly. If you do reach these target groups, you need to really ensure that the people in question are given proper support and understand the context they are entering and what to expect. This is really crucial to guarantee a successful experience. It ensures that the advice provision is not a one-off, but can be continued on a systematic basis so that an organization systematically works on reaching underrepresented groups and does not just seek to achieve the imposed quota. For example, work is being done with OCMWs (Public Social Welfare Centres) to enable disadvantaged groups to go to presentations. Good supervision is needed here to avoid a negative experience and stigmatisation. It is a question of sitting down with the right actors beforehand in order to clearly assess the objectives you want to achieve – in this case more or better advice provision. The target group's views need to be sounded out beforehand: what obstacles are there for you or the people in your association? How can we tackle these? What are our objectives, and what is your attitude towards them? It is important to avoid a situation where you have an institution or an organization trying to sell something to a group of people who have absolutely no interest in it beforehand or have never heard of it.

That's why I simply want to emphasise here that it is important to find equal partners and to include that structural aspect and that aspect of equality right from the start.

*How, in your opinion, can the Flemish government ministries support outreach attempts to reach those who do not traditionally engage in the formal education system or who have become alienated from this system?*

*Is there any national level strategy or support to provide for training/education of a) community leaders, b) teachers, in areas which experience most social deprivation and marginalisation?*

That is no easy matter. It is a question of how the Flemish government relates to the local authorities. It is really a matter of ensuring that outreach is organized at local level. For the Flemish government, it is again up to the policy research centres, for example to coach people at local level in outreach and to ensure that they have a sufficiently broad field of vision to involve these important actors.

*Can you say something about the progression from non-formal adult education into formal education?*

It's the story of the recognition of prior learning again. We need to make sure that the individual is in a position to start using the competencies acquired via non-formal education in whatever context. The government is also busy building bridges between non-formal and formal adult education. Another point, of course, is that you need to adapt your own training to this.

*Exactly. Can non-formal education be used a means to open access to formal learning? Should the levels of non-formal education be adjusted in such a way?*

People acquire competencies within the non-formal educational sectors. However, this does not mean that we are specifically going to start training people so that they can enter formal education or the job market. These are two different things. Even so, the non-formal educational activities also need to be of a high quality at all times. I regard that as obvious. As the government we of course need to ensure that that quality is monitored and guaranteed. What the right instruments are for doing so is another question.

*Can you say something about childcare in non-formal adult education?*

That is a question that is very difficult for me to comment on. It is clear that the Flemish government needs to make an effort to keep the barriers to education as low as possible. What the right instruments are for this is not always easy to decide. At present there are a number of measures which specifically address this need. I'm thinking, for example, of the €1 measure for young people up to the age of 26 for gaining access to museums. This is a financial barrier that is being taken away. In conjunction with this the government must also arrange supervision,



because what's the point of ensuring that young people can get in if they then find it a turn-off once they're there? But the same goes for other barriers, too.

Childcare is in fact a question that needs to be approached on an interministerial basis. For this, dialogue is needed, between the minister responsible for non-formal or formal adult education and the minister responsible for welfare and public health. Despite this, within our own policy domain we obviously also need to pay as much attention as possible to this issue, and we can talk to organizations and institutions about this subject. Specific measures can be worked out which will operate alongside the existing regulations to lower the barriers. These can be based on research. It's often a question of experiments that need to be tried out, too. So it is also a matter of trial and error, in which monitoring and evaluation are crucial. You carry on ensuring or checking that you have deployed the right measures and that they have actually achieved something. Obviously it is difficult to measure, but I think it is of crucial importance.

*What obstacles and/or opportunities in your opinion exist to use of the school building after school hours for adult education courses?*

That is hard for me to say. It is often something that is arranged at local level, in which case it is a matter for the local or provincial policy level. The Flemish government can draw the attention of organizations to the need to use infrastructure efficiently, but things do have to be arranged at local level. As the Flemish government you can facilitate or remove potential obstacles, but the obstacles need to be identified on a bottom-up basis so that you can react and take account of them at Flemish policy level.

### 3. Translated interview 2

*The Flemish policy for formal adult education in the policy domain of Education and Training*

The policy area of Education and Training is responsible for the funding of the formal adult education.

Sigrid Callebert is head of the agency for higher and adult education within the Ministry for education and training.

*Is there a central committee in your government department with specific responsibility for:*

- social inclusion;
- access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups;
- lifelong learning;

- *literacy;*
- *the non-formal education sector.*

For lifelong learning there is certainly a formal structure: the Flemish Education Council<sup>8</sup> (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad* - VLOR). One part of VLOR is the Council for Lifelong Learning, with working groups on lifelong learning and adult education. These working groups take an in-depth look at certain themes. When the government presents dossiers about the regulations, they offer advice. They also work on various dossiers, such as learning in the workplace in adult education. This requires the introduction of flexibility measures. They have also considered the financial incentives. Besides, there is also a working group on integration policy. In short, there is definitely a formal structure for lifelong learning.

We also have a structure within the government itself. As an agency, we provide the secretariat to an informal dialogue between the educational sector, the departmental office and the actors responsible for policy preparation. These include actors in the sector, the umbrella organizations, the trade union representatives, the administrative authorities, and so on.

We no longer use the term 'lifelong learning', as we are in fact in the process of gradually removing it from our terminology. This was formerly the department of lifelong learning, but we have dropped this name. We are positioning ourselves more around the concept of formal 'adult education', albeit with numerous links and cooperation with adult education in general.

Intensive work is also being done at the interface between education and work. For this, there is the 'Strategic education and training policy' project (*Strategisch Onderwijs- en Vormingsbeleid*). This involves a steering group on Education, Training and Work, and the aspect of non-formal adult education is certainly also covered. Within the project, among other things, a sub-working group has been started up on funding and other incentives that we offer, such as training vouchers, which reinforce social inclusion. I group these together.

As far as access for educationally disadvantaged groups is concerned, there is no real separate structure; however, this aspect is firmly rooted in various other things. I am thinking here, for example, of adult basic education. For this sector there is a dedicated support structure. Firstly, there are the various educational support services of the different umbrella organizations and then there is VOCVO (the Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education); besides there is also what

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<sup>8</sup> The VLOR is the strategic advisory council for the education and training policy of the Flemish Community. The council operates independent of the Department of Education and Training and of the competent Minister.

I would call a virtual steering group. These structures, particularly VOCVO, are supposed to work on accessibility for adults, and one specific target group is educationally disadvantaged groups.

As far as literacy is concerned, the Flemish government's Plan on Increasing Literacy (*Geletterdheid Verhogen*) is the most important instrument. This is a plan on which various steering groups, agencies and departments work.

*Are there representatives from the at risk target groups involved in these committees?*

A student sits on VLOR. So yes, the participants are represented. As regards VOCVO: I don't know exactly how they work and which surveys they use. What I do know, though, is that more quality surveys need to be performed. Such surveys usually involve submitting a questionnaire to a group of adults. It's also true to say that we are paying more and more attention to the question how we can also represent the learners. But whether this aspect is formally anchored in the system and how the link is made with strategies is not entirely clear to me. I do know, for example, that in adult basic education work is done via the ambassadors, and there they definitely are represented, because formal moments are organized there. These are the occasions on which they receive their diplomas as ambassadors.

The GENT-5 agreement is the framework for educational collaboration between Flanders and the Netherlands. Within this collaboration they also worked for a year on the theme of basic skills. We also questioned these ambassadors at that point and focused on them. Then a calendar was made, for example.

*Is there a position of responsibility in your government department, specifically to develop and monitor implementation on these issues:*

- *social inclusion;*
- *access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups;*
- *lifelong learning;*
- *literacy;*
- *the non-formal education sector.*

*In other words, if progress is not made in these areas who takes responsibility to drive things forward?*

One of the roles of VOCVO and of the other support structures that have been set up by the Decree on Adult Education is to increase the level of participation among these target groups. How will monitoring take place? Via collaboration agreements – with the educational support service, with VOCVO, and so on.

*Where is most attention paid to educationally disadvantaged groups?*

I have the feeling that this is still a little more prevalent in adult basic education. The centres for adult basic education have always had the possibility of organising specially tailored activities. For example, they organize a course in using a mobile phone, on the basis of which they can see whether someone needs additional training in counting, maths or languages. They have tried to identify a target group in this way.

In VOCVO's action plan everything is combined: educational innovation, quality expertise, promotion, and so on. One definite objective is to increase the level of participation. So everything is more or less included.

*Are there any specific structures for communication at a strategic level between regional, local and Flemish levels with regard to:*

- *social inclusion;*
- *access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups;*
- *lifelong learning;*
- *literacy;*
- *the non-formal education sector.*

Not really. We have provincial education, but we don't really deal differently with these things at that level. There is some management input via the local context, based on local circumstances. But I can't really answer in the affirmative or in the negative to this. In fact it's not something I am aware of.

*Are there structures for dialogue and a common strategy on any of these areas, between government departments of Education, Employment, etc.? How can this dialogue be improved?*

The Steering Group on Education, Training and Work, which has already been mentioned, works on a cross-disciplinary basis. It includes someone from VDAB (Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service), from Syntra, from the Department of Work, and so on. Our Agency is also represented on it. When you work in this way, you notice more quickly that there are blind spots. This is the case, for example, with the working group on financial incentives. In this working group we work with various target groups: course participants, working people, unemployed people and so on... but we have noticed that somehow we are failing to include retired people, or have ceased to do so. Retired people used to be exempted from tuition fees, but this is no longer the case. We also notice that some groups, such as working people, already have many sources of help to rely on. The same is true of unemployed people, though in their case it is exclusively in connection with their approach to getting back into work. In short, overarching initiatives are important as a means of answering the question: are we reaching the people we want to reach,

and are we sure that there are no unwanted external effects whereby, for example, one person still earns money from taking part, whereas someone else has to pay the fees himself virtually in full? These are the kind of things we are working on.

*What percentage of your government department budget goes on adult education? What kind of budget measures are taken?*

Adult education is not free. Leaving aside any exemptions, a fee of 1 euro per hour is charged. As well as the regular government subsidies, the organizations in formal adult education can also sometimes gain access to ESF (European Social Fund) money, for example for projects in connection with NT2, Dutch on the Work floor and partnerships with the Houses of Dutch (*Huizen van het Nederlands*). Adult basic education also definitely works with ESF money. They used also to work in some cases with local funds they received from the city – this was particularly the case in Antwerp. But the infrastructure is still often provided by the local and provincial authorities.

*Are the tuition fees differentiated? Or are they the same for all target groups?*

There is certainly differentiation in the fee policy. There are exemption categories, ranging from complete exemption to partial exemption in which between a half and a quarter is deducted. These exemption categories are included in Article 109 of the Decree on Adult Education. Those entitled to an exemption include people undergoing civic integration, people who receive benefits from the Public Welfare Centre, people getting into employment projects supported by VDAB, ... plus people who can show that they live with someone who falls into this category, for instance people who have a disability, people on unemployment benefits, etc.

This is also a financing stream – within the Decree on Adult Education – in which the government steps in on behalf of the course participant. Also, the centres have to contribute to a fund. Thus for those who pay €1, the centre for adult education has to pay €0.25 per teaching hour to the fund. It's a kind of solidarity system.

*I have a breakdown of the total education budget in percentage terms here. Formal adult education accounts for over 5% and, expressed in thousands of Euros, 463 thousand – in other words 463 million.*

Yes, that's right, around 250 to 260 million goes on salaries. A certain stagnation has set in there. However, we have experienced reasonable growth in the number of instruction hours times the number of course participants. Because of this, the government has been unable to keep pace with the funding, and recently introduced a new financing system. With this system, the operating funds for the centres have been raised to €1 per instruction hour, whereas the rate

used to be absurdly low: 0,39 cents. But care was taken to ensure that there were sufficient measures included in the decree so that nobody was excluded.

*Please comment on measures taken by national government to support adult learning outside the major cities in your country.*

Formal adult education is divided at local level into 13 consortiums, with which we have also concluded collaboration agreements. The consortiums draw up a five-year plan. For this, they have to conduct a regional survey. They have to compile an educational needs plan, which has to be completed by the end of July. They have to take account of the local context and of the difficulties at that level.

The programming of the centres for adult education used to be initiated mainly by the government. Now we have a dual procedure. If there is consensus between the members of a consortium and it is about training courses which are not provided for here – in other words not language courses, higher professional education courses, etc., but industrial technical courses, then there is an agreement by definition. There is no longer any need to submit it to the Flemish government. The procedure is organized very simply. But they do have to test the courses against their educational plan and their needs plan. If there is no consensus, there is an appeal procedure in which we address the VLOR, but this is a laborious procedure. In this way a resurgence of explosive growth in training courses is prevented. I am told that adult education used to be subject to cut-throat competition. But that was a bit before my time. So the government provided a guarantee that language courses, home economics courses, IT courses and so on could no longer be freely programmed. So the outlines have been established, and within them there is freedom to work. The local context certainly has to be taken into account.

*Are there other future plans and policy measures taken by the Flemish government?*

I have taken a look at the contribution of the Flemish administrative authorities to the coalition agreement. Target group policy or inclusive policy and literacy are clearly included, so you can see that these are things we are really aiming for. There are different learning requirements and demands involved, not just on the basis of an economic context but also on the basis of the individual participants. One learner may make progress more quickly, may have better learning skills than another, some may have specific learning difficulties, and so on. The point is to respond flexibly to learning paths, to society's needs. We also want to look at whether it is necessary to engage in study guidance, learning support.

We will also distribute more information about learning paths, indicate where you can find information about adult education, activate the examination board, not just the central

examination board here in Brussels, but perhaps in a regional context give centres for adult education some latitude so that you can involve people more from the local region in order to follow a diploma path.

We will also create a more solid basis for things such as workplace learning and distance learning. E-learning is being completely modified for the centres for adult education and the centres for adult basic education. More and more freedom is being allowed, and financial incentives are being built into projects. In all these projects on distance education, a specific look is also being taken. More attention is being paid to target groups, people who are working or those who have difficulty getting around. This is also leading to educational instruments which introduce more flexibility into the learning path.

Study financing for adult education is also being looked at.

*What about prison education? Are there specific plans to improve access to education for adults in prisons in your country? Who is responsible?*

Intensive work is being done on this at the VOCVO support centre. The main problem there is the desire to introduce e-learning. Flexible learning paths are not always easy in the prison infrastructure.

We have also given many prisoners BIS (*Begeleid Individueel Studeren* - Individual Study Support) courses. We will continue to do this until there is a good alternative.

*Are prisoners the only target group who can still make use of the BIS range of services?*

Yes, prisoners and people preparing for an exam with the central examination board. But this latter group is in fact negligible. Then there's also the question of the turnover, which represents a bit of a problem.

*According to a survey we have conducted, remedial classes during the year are provided for 39.5% of ISCED 2 and 43,8% of ISCED 3 Level Institutions. How can you explain this? How can a national policy facilitate this to be increased?*

I don't really have an explanation for this, but there certainly is such a need. Wouldn't this situation have grown historically, though? Learning path guidance may have been somewhat neglected. Lifelong learning has been on the agenda for a while now, but that doesn't necessarily mean ... Lifelong learning has been very relevant for over a decade now, but people are still finding their feet a little ... The qualification structure is something people have placed a lot of hope in. This will make it possible to position and describe qualifications very clearly. Then somebody will be able to say: I already have this experience, so I need this and that and then I'll reach this particular level.

*What are the main obstacles to establishing a mechanism for the recognition of prior non-formal learning and work experience in order to open access for adults to the education system? How can these obstacles, in your view, be overcome?*

We recognise previously acquired competencies within formal adult education by means of the exemption policy. Such recognition relates to experience and competencies. What was the system like before? Suppose someone had tried to complete a course at a college of higher education or at a university, had stopped but had passed a number of subjects: they would have come along with their results sheet and been granted an exemption by the principal. If this didn't work in one centre for adult education, it might work in another. As a result, there was little harmonisation and quality in exemption policy and the recognition of competencies. Because the news would spread very quickly among course participants: 'Go to that centre because you'll get that exemption easily'. In short, we need to have a quality system of some kind, an assessment system to ensure that what is validated at one centre would also be validated at another ...

*... Is a further flexibility of accreditation systems needed?*

... A fear that exists regarding proof of experience, because this is also involved, can be summed up by the question: why would you bother taking a course if you can also gain access to the profession on the basis of proof of experience? Aren't we in fact subjecting our own market to competition? I believe that this is not the case. I believe we need not suffer from agoraphobia in this respect, but instead we need to turn this into a win-win situation. Even if someone has prior experience, it may be useful to do a bit of extra studying: if you do this and that extra, you will be qualified for this and that. For adults, we need to think more in terms of using portfolios, in which experience should also have a place. If I can return for a moment to your previous point about study guidance, we must avoid seeing that guidance purely in terms of formal learning paths or diploma paths. I believe that in adult education we must not copy the centres for pupil counselling in compulsory education (CLB) and study advice in tertiary education, as that won't work in adult education. Instead, I think we need to work with interviews with adults, in which we ask what the persons want to achieve. On the basis of this we need to choose from among the existing instruments...But that means that the biggest problem, in my view, is confidence in the exemption policy and its quality – the two things are related.

*What are the most important things a State policy can do about that?*

Work is definitely needed on quality. A new agency is going to be set up within the government field of Education and Training: the Quality Agency. It will play a role in this. It will take a look at good practices in connection with quality monitoring. This will have a big impact. Someone who



goes through an EVC (recognition of prior acquired competencies) procedure and gains access to a certain educational level as a result... We need to ensure that this doesn't lower the quality.

*Is there any State incentive for institutions to reserve places specifically for underrepresented groups, such as ethnic minorities, traditionally disadvantaged groups, ... In which types of institution would it make sense to work with reserved places for disadvantaged groups and what barriers and opportunities do you see for implementing this?*

... Not so far, or not that I know of at any rate. We remain preoccupied with the issue of equality and equal treatment, which is a constitutional requirement within education. That requirement is also partly protective, ensuring everyone equal access. The Decree on Adult Education includes a requirement that the first to present him/herself – enrolments take place in sequence – must be registered. That rule is meant to effectively combat exclusion.

*But doesn't that work against people who experience more of an information barrier, who find it hard to get hold of the right information about adult education? Might that not work even more to the benefit of those who are already benefiting, because they know the ropes and understand when, where and how to enrol?*

This often happens in the area that borders the Netherlands. We receive complaints at the start of the school year: "I would like to enrol for an IT course too, but I simply can't get in anywhere because the IT courses are all full." The exemption policy is much less of a factor there, so there are far more course participants for the centre. In the decree it simply says that everyone must have access and a centre must take enrolments in the order in which course participants present themselves.

*Let's return for a moment to that blind spot to which you referred at the start. Reaching retired people, who have been slightly neglected in the way you mentioned. Are there any initiatives in progress there? Could there be solutions in the future which will reach these people more?*

That is an important point. A first evaluation of the Decree on Adult Education is scheduled for autumn 2009. That is fast. That evaluation involves a financial evaluation, but also a review of the exemption categories – we will be including that. We want to find out which target groups we are no longer reaching – I think that retired people will turn out to be one of these target groups.

*Is this caused by the tuition fee of one euro per hour?*

Yes, but I have to say that that is something of a hunch, which is precisely why we will be doing the evaluation. At the start of the year, we had quite a few complaints from retired people who said: "The registration fee for us used to be lower, we learn for pleasure." This function of the services provided is also important. It's about social cohesion and being involved in society.

Others whose financial position is more secure say: "Such comments are ridiculous, because it's still cheap." So we need to assess this kind of thing. We can already see that language courses and IT courses have fallen behind, and those are two types of course that used to be taken very frequently by retired people. But the research and the analysis will be starting soon.

*What changes do you hope will be achieved in 5 years time to promote access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation? What changes do you realistically expect will be achieved in 5 years time to promote access to education for those groups most at risk of underrepresentation?*

(...) It is important to look for the right forms of collaboration. I'm talking not just about collaboration within formal learning, but about relations with bodies outside the formal learning system, such as VDAB and Syntra.

*How, in your opinion, can a Flemish government support such outreach attempts to reach those who do not traditionally engage in the formal education system or who have become alienated from this system?*

I really believe that ensuring solid local foundations for consortiums is one of the crucial things in the Decree on Adult Education.

*Don't the consortiums amount to an upsizing exercise?*

The centres have to have plenty of sites. Their range of courses has to cover the range of needs and the entire local region. The question is whether they used to have such a solid local basis in the past. Perhaps they did, some of them may have had very good local contacts. But in some areas there were also a great many blind spots, especially in the remoter parts of Flanders. I think that as a government you may be able to achieve more by setting up a formal structure and by entering into collaboration agreements. Otherwise you are a bit dependent on the initiative taken by the centres themselves. The resources used to be highly fragmented.

*Do you think that that will have an effect on the course participants too, in terms of the way that they progress from the centres for basic education to the centres for adult education?*

Yes, we certainly hope so. That's not happening enough at the moment. These participants naturally need a very well-supported transition because basic education is very small-scale with small groups, whereas the centres for adult education work with large classes. So it's clear that there is a need for a better transition. The centres for adult education also tend to cast doubt on the skills of people who come from basic education. With the new structure I hope that this progression will be more successful. As a government all you can do is provide the structures and instruments; then you can only hope that they will be taken up.

*Please comment on future plans by the Flemish government to develop lifelong learning.*

Study guidance is definitely an area where we have to take the necessary steps. Besides we have to work on an equal opportunities policy in adult education – in fact that's a political issue. A look also needs to be taken at people who have dropped out from secondary education, but who try to obtain their secondary education diploma later on. We need to consider whether study funding should be given to these people. The course participant's status is another question we believe is important, because a status may ensure access to study funding, to a combination of rights and duties, and so on. For example, take the reorientation from higher education to a centre for adult education. This doesn't always work equally well. A student in regular education has a status. He has a funding status and can gain support. A course participant in formal adult education has no status. In this case, reorientation does not work very well because all the different policy levels think in terms of their own mechanisms and decrees. Some harmonisation may be needed there.

*Let's talk about childcare. In our survey data, childcare difficulties were described by approximately 10% of adult learners across all ISCED levels as a barrier to participation in education. How in your opinion can a state policy offer more support to adults to help overcome this barrier in the future?*

The centres complain vociferously about the lack of childcare. In this respect, VDAB can offer a great deal more to adults to allow them to enter education. Childcare is becoming more and more fashionable among education providers. I can see it at the Houses of Dutch, the centres for adult basic education in Brussels here, ... there's a crèche in the local neighbourhood, round the corner.

*Does a state policy have a role to play in this?*

Yes, I do think that the government has a role to play in this. A study has shown that many people opt for a career break in order to participate in education. I regard that as excessive. We can create the necessary basic conditions. However, I don't think that should happen within the education and training policy domain. I believe we need to engage in talks with those responsible for welfare policy, and ask whether they can reserve places within regular subsidised childcare. It is primarily these local initiatives that we must support.

*What obstacles and opportunities in your opinion exist to the use of school buildings after school hours for adult education courses? Have any efforts been made to get schools to be sites of adult education in the community?*

A formal initiative on this point is included in the Decree on Adult Education. Adult education used not to receive any subsidies from AGION (*AGentschap voor Infrastructuur in het ONderwijs*), the Flemish agency for infrastructure in education. That possibility has now been created. So providers in adult education can formally turn to government funds for infrastructure. There exists a measure concerning property tax which hinders the opening up of the infrastructure. Once a school or educational institution opens up its buildings to other bodies, it has to pay property tax. However, that measure has recently been scaled back.

*Another question about outreach strategies: going to people in local communities, inviting people via associative structures, organising visits to the centre in order to attract new target groups...what initiatives are being undertaken? Is this something for which the Flemish government is providing incentives?*

The government does ask the consortiums to look beyond their immediate context. They are supposed to work together. They also need to attune their training policy to the region. Exactly how they should do that is not something that we impose. However, there are already plenty of good examples of cooperation. In Antwerp, for instance, there is cooperation between adult education and the Antwerp police academy.

The initiative for cooperation and outreach is thus left to the centres for basic education and adult education. It is not a specific policy objective or an action point to be ticked off in a collaboration agreement.

The recently introduced Decree on Adult Education has led to a major structural reform. This has taken place not so much in the education itself as in the support. Maybe it is a disadvantage that the decree includes few instruments for widening the group of participants. However, it does contain financial instruments: incentives, categories of registration fee exemptions, flexible learning paths, distance learning, etc.

*Many people from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds have no space at home to study. What alternative physical sites do you think could be realistically made available for them for their learning?*

This is something that is very much a part of government policy. 10% more funding is given to the providers of adult basic education to function as open learning centres. So this is something that definitely is being encouraged. The centres for adult education are also given 10% extra for the deployment of personnel, mainly in order to coordinate support and guidance for learners and to create open learning environments. After all, not everyone has the same opportunity to learn at

home. Computers are also made available in a library or media library. There are very good examples of this.

*Is this stimulated through a Flemish state policy?*

Yes. The organization of distance learning is included as an extra factor in the funding. The inspectorate of education is looking at how this is organized.

*According to our survey, the attention for outreach strategies in general within formal adult education - like engaging local communities - is rather poor. What is your opinion about outreach in adult education? Are there representatives from the at risk target groups involved in designing and implementing outreach approaches to reach those most excluded from education?*

This mainly occurs in connection with the provision of instruction in Dutch as a second language. There are examples of centres for adult basic education talking to and attracting people via their children in primary education. There are also many centres for adult basic education which have a site within primary education and hence use premises in primary schools.

However, outreach mainly takes place via key figures on an ad hoc basis, arising from existing contacts.

*What about the promotion of access by reducing other costs such as exam fees, books and other materials?*

The centres for basic education and the centres for adult education are allowed to charge course participants for the cost of materials. Sometimes things go wrong with this, and we then have to take action. For instance they are not allowed to charge for insurance and so on. The charge must really relate to materials that need to be sold or passed on at the actual cost price. We can impose penalties if necessary, but we prefer to take an awareness-raising approach.

*How do you explain the fact that little effort is made by adult education institutions, colleges and universities to widen access for underrepresented groups?*

Yes, I believe that for a very long time there was too little policy focus on this. Only the previous and, especially, the current Minister for Education have introduced an equal opportunities policy and paid attention to disadvantaged groups. To be honest, I think this is the main reason.

*In colleges about 30% of the respondents state that they don't have a written mission statement concerning adult education; another 15% state they're not aware of such a statement. About 40% of the centres for adult education, 56% of the colleges and 76% of the university departments interviewed state that they don't actively recruit disadvantaged groups. Which obstacles might explain this result and how can they be overcome?*

At this agency we are now also engaged in setting up an organizational management system and structure. We are also working on a mission and vision. We have included maximum development opportunities for participants in adult education. I believe this is to do with policy. Things used to be mainly left to VDAB, certainly as regards the unemployed. Compulsory education has a general overall objective. Adult education will need to catch up in this respect and start playing this role far more, the role of involving disadvantaged groups. It can do this by means of short courses, flexible courses, the return to society, and so on.

Second-chance education within adult education particularly caters to these disadvantaged target groups. And within the department we are going to try to work with them too. I don't know whether you are familiar with the *Jojo* project?

No.

This is an employment project of the Ministry for Education and Training for low-skilled young people among other groups – young people who have left secondary education without a diploma. In this project, they gain a place in education again, so that partly on the basis of their experience they can work with young people in schools, with the added possibility of obtaining additional qualifications.

*This is in fact a state incentive for adult education institutions to reach underrepresented groups, such as early school-leavers, so that they can be teachers. Within this project, is there collaboration with centres for adult education?*

I would like to set up a sort of fair to which we invite those centres for adult education that want to work with young people. At the fair, we would offer the target group of low-skilled people the possibility of trying out the learning opportunities at the centres depending on their interest. Of course, these are small-scale projects.

In relation to the recognition of previously acquired competencies, this is another area we ourselves are working on actively. Take adult basic education: normally you need a higher education diploma or a university degree to be able to work as a teacher in basic education. One of the access routes into the profession now involves the recognition of competencies acquired outside tertiary education. So this is something we are increasingly introducing into our structures. The people who work in this way at a centre for basic education thus become a kind of ambassador for those who enter adult basic education.

## SECTION 6

### CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study gathered information on widening access to adult education for groups of adults that are not likely to participate. It also included descriptions of projects that serve as models of good practice for adult education institutions.

Our conclusions fall into two broad categories: (1) some trends and common issues that arose from the case descriptions and (2) some key findings emerging from the cross-case analysis of the models of practice, described as a set of critical success factors. The factual findings are intertwined with policy recommendations and recommendations for further study.

#### 1. Trends in attracting new target groups and widening access

##### *The recognition and validation of prior learning*

The case studies in this report reflect the fact that recently there has been given increased attention to the recognition and validation of prior learning. All interviewees agree that it is important for adult education institutions to validate the prior learning and work experiences of the adult learners. They underline the importance of the recognition and validation of prior learning as means to remove barriers for further learning. Several cases accentuate the fact that institutions must not undervalue the skills and knowledge people have at the moment of entering a programme - even when they are poorly educated. Their lived experiences should be regarded as very valuable and should be used in the educational process.

The validation of prior learning is not new in adult education and the cases in this report illustrate the way institutions handle this. Notwithstanding the experience and expertise the institutions have in this matter - especially in formal adult education and tertiary education - they still see it as a work in progress. Some non-formal institutions miss a general framework or flexible qualification structure for the validation of prior learning. Because in informal and non-formal education the educational context is less planned and structured and the objectives are negotiated with the learners, assessing the acquired skills is not always possible. This makes validation hard to do. Others question the wider acceptance of the validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills. In other words: the civil effect of the validation of basic skills acquisition (like in formal adult basic education) is questioned.

##### *Childcare*

Adult education institutions rarely ever organize childcare for the participants' children. It is not looked upon as an unsuitable strategy, but organizations seem to find it hard to organize since it is not part of their core business and they are not being funded for it in a direct way. Especially in

non-formal education and community education the organizers take into account the fact that some target groups experience difficulties in finding childcare for a reasonable price. Those organizations put work and effort into changing their programmes so adults with young children do get a chance to participate (for example, by avoiding activities on Wednesday afternoon when there is no school).

#### *Reduced fees*

Offering specific target groups an exemption of tuition or a reduced tuition fee is very common in formal and non-formal adult education and in tertiary education in Flanders. All interviewees agree that the price of education should not be a barrier to participate. However, because of economic reasons (such as the recent recession) and budgetary considerations (such as the limited public funding) not all educational activities are free of charges. Yet in adult basic education, participants never pay a tuition fee and in non-formal adult education a lot of activities are free of charges too. This is also the case for prison education. Even in tertiary education, measures are taken to keep the tuition fees as low as possible. For low-income students the tuition is partly subsidized.

Evidence from the case studies reveals that the policies on the reduction of fees in adult education are nearly always category-based. Sometimes the actual price policy the institution implements is insisted or regulated by the state.

#### *Reserved places*

Reserving places or the imposition of quotas for specific target groups is not a strategy adult education institutions in Flanders make heavily use of. The main reason is that when not used properly, reserved places and quota for specific target groups can easily lead to stigmatisation. It can also become a way of 'forcing' adults into lifelong learning. As an interviewed state official indicates: *"It is important to avoid a situation where (...) an institution or an organization is trying to sell something to a group of people who have absolutely no interest in it beforehand or have never heard of it"* (B1\_01).

Besides that, the issue of equality and equal treatment is an important constitutional requirement within education in Flanders. By ensuring all adults equal access to education, the state wants to combat exclusion and discrimination. Because of this, working with reserved places is discouraged.

#### *Outreach to target groups*

The case studies in this report show that no institution expects adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to come into a classroom spontaneously. Therefore the organizations, especially the



institutions for non-formal adult education, try to provide education as close as possible to the adults. This means organizations often reach out to the local communities. Working with community leaders is a strategy to ensure that the theme and content of courses are linked to what the target group is really interested in. Civil society organizations are often best placed to reach those community leaders, therefore working together with those organizations is usually considered desirable. Other strategies are: organising an event, arranging visits, etc.

Although outreach is commonly referred to as very important, the problems one encounters putting it into practice can be manifold. One of the main problems for the institutions is the cost of time, money and effort. Reaching out to those coming from a disadvantaged background is not always the first or the only concern of the state funding the programme.

#### *Bridges between non-formal and formal adult education*

The interviewees in this study claim that adults look for different experiences in formal and in non-formal education. Even though the programmes in non-formal education may be very similar to those in formal education (for instance programmes on entrepreneurial training and business management), the target groups are usually very different.

However, a lot of the presented models of practice show that institutions for formal education (offering mainly classroom activities) and institutions for non-formal education (offering mainly out-of-school activities supporting basic skills, etc.) often work together intensely. They do so to minimize the overlap and gaps in course offering but also to boost productivity and to create significant and positive spillover effects in terms of participants. As a result, a lot of bridges are being built between the two types of adult education, yet fixed paths of progression from non-formal into formal adult education are still exceptional. The interviewed managers argue that looking upon non-formal education as a stepping stone to formal adult education does not do any justice to the possibilities and dynamic nature of this type of education.

## **2. Models of practice: key issues and success factors**

In the previous paragraph we have listed some trends in attracting new target groups as they arose from the cases in this report. It is useful at this moment to take a look at the factors the models of (good) practice have in common. We focus on the factors that encourage reaching out to new groups and widening access for those groups. Of equal importance is the development of multiple pathways for underrepresented groups to further learning.

If there is one overall conclusion to be drawn from the data and analysis presented in this report, it is that opening access to adult education for underrepresented groups is not a matter of simply solving a puzzle. There is no one or two key success factors to widen access in a sustained

matter. At first sight, it is basically a matter of getting the right organizations together at the right time focussed on the right target group. But the case studies show there is more to it than that.

#### *Vision on underrepresented groups*

Widening access to lifelong learning is a matter of having a clear vision. Notwithstanding good intentions, a lot of educational institutions still fail in their ambition to reach those that would not participate on their own initiative simply because those institutions lack a clear vision and a strategy aligned with that vision. Therefore it is important for an organization to frame its mission and vision in terms of access.

Several factors help to shape the institution's vision on opening access for underrepresented groups. First of all the institution must have the urge to make a change and must trust its own ability to follow it through. In other words: the management as well as the tutors must be supportive and ready to make an effort. Secondly the institution must be aware of the barriers hindering access. Tutors must realize the fact that some groups being underrepresented does not mean they do not value education or have no interest in learning. This brings us to the conclusion that in order to meet the learning needs of the marginalized groups, it is important to identify and assess their needs. The strategic choices of the institution must be based on this. If not so, the educational approach will not be very effective.

Thirdly and closely related to the latter point, several of the interviewed tutors are convinced that a lot of aspects concerning access remain rather puzzling when merely looked upon it from an institutional point of view. According to the interviewees it is fruitful to also look at adult education from an individual point of view. Adopting a more client-centred perspective should therefore be encouraged, for instance, the idea of an 'individual detention plan' in the case on prison education.

#### *Flexible adult education: a flexible policy, a flexible organizational structure, a flexible programme*

Policies to widen access to marginalized and underrepresented groups should be flexible. This means that in attempting to meet the various needs of learners (and of underrepresented groups in particular) an organization must be willing to question its own policy and its own educational approach.

As one cannot expect the underrepresented groups to make significant personal adjustments, the organizational structures must adjust to the abilities and needs of the groups. These structures must offer adult learners the opportunity to learn at their own speed and level. In formal adult education this approach certainly implies preparatory programmes, transition programmes, remedial classes, etc. The cases in this report illustrate that holding on to the traditional

structures of the organization often hinders the involvement of new participants, sometimes even without the organization being aware of it.

For example, one matter in particular that is central in most of the models of practice is the location. Most models emphasize that institutions must be aware of the fact that reaching out to underrepresented groups is often a matter of leaving the traditional class room setting. It involves organizations to look beyond the formal educational settings.

Apart from a flexible policy and structure, attracting new groups also requires flexible programmes: alternative forms of instruction, flexible curricula, etc. The tutors must be able to adjust the programme in order to face the challenges that stem from the position, experiences and background of the target groups.

#### *Category-specific versus broad policies*

The models of practice under study in this report show attention to various at-risk groups, but especially to those affected by a language and a social disadvantage (ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees).

Nearly all models adopt a category-specific policy. They are based upon the question: what target group or population should be served first? Yet the interviewees argue that such a policy strategy is not the only possible one. Avoiding the focus on one or just a few groups involves a more indirect approach which in some cases can be successful too. It certainly avoids stigmatization and hard to make decisions such as, which target population should we focus on first?

#### *Life-centered adult education*

The selected models of good practice in this report support the theory that attracting groups of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds can only be successful if the educational process is life-centered. A successful programme should be related to real life events and topics that affect adults in a direct way: whether it is the job prospect they have, the community or neighborhood they are living in, the business they want to start, the hobby they have, etc.

This way the learning process is meaningful and relevant to the participants, which is important as learning can not be enforced. It also makes the programme personally relevant.

#### *Collaboration and networking*

As already mentioned, key words in nearly all the selected models in this report are 'collaboration' and 'close cooperation'. In order to open access to under-represented groups a lot of adult education institutions (have to) work collaboratively. They work in close cooperation with organizations that specialize in education but just as well with social services, public authorities, enterprises in social economy, etc.

*Guidance and counseling (and testing)*

Not surprisingly, the cases in this study show that under-represented and under-educated adults usually need more guidance and counseling than other participants. Because these participants are sometimes uncertain about their abilities and about what they really want, it is very important tutors make them feel at ease and offer them the right kind of information. This type of guidance and counseling can be done through the specific programmes, but also by having informal talks with the participants before or after classes, by adopting an open door policy, etc. Some of the case studies show that screening (testing, assessing, etc.) is not necessarily a disincentive to participation. Although a lot of target groups are rather uncomfortable in a testing situation, there are some clear advantages of determining the skill level (e.g. literacy level) of a new participant. When done properly, it can in fact show the participants their learning potential and motivate them to start or continue a learning process.

*Staff and tutors*

As a plethora of researchers have shown before, instructors and tutors play a key role in the recruitment and retention of hard to reach groups in adult education. The models of practice in our study clearly reflect the fact that the educational and training staff must be able to fulfill a variety of roles. Related to marginalized groups and groups at risk of social exclusion, there is much more at stake than just teaching or guiding the educational process; further research could explore those different roles in more detail.

The staff is especially important for enhancing motivation. The staff members play an essential role in formal guidance (overcoming stereotypes, recognizing resistance, etc.).

*Funding*

The government plays an important role in making the access of new groups of adults possible. The extent to which institutions are able to focus on new groups of participants depends largely on the funding they get for it. Attracting immigrant groups to participate in adult education is an issue that is higher on the agenda of policy makers than it ever was before. Yet, the norms defined by the governments are not always inviting institutions to make an extra effort to attract new groups. To the contrary, the pressure to enlarge the group size, the funding based on the amount of participants, etc. do not stimulate institutions to get involved in working with under-represented groups.

*Impact of the recession*

One of the aspects we have looked at more closely in this report is the impact of the recession on the access of marginalized groups to adult education.

Strange as it may seem, none of the senior managers interviewed for this research recognize immediate effects of the recent economic recession (started in the first few months of 2008). Most of them claim that the recession did not have the same negative impact on adult learning and adult education as it had on other fields.

First of all, there is no rise of tuition fees noticeable yet. A lot of the practices in this report include free or low cost adult education courses or have a tuition assistance programme. And although more adults face unemployment or bleak employment outlooks, and more adults have to cope with financial problems and pressures, etc. the financial barriers do not seem more of an issue than it was before the recession. At the same time, from an institutional perspective, our data indicate that over the last year it has become much harder to get state funding for new projects (or even non-state funding for that matter) and it must not pass unnoticed that most of the practices set out in this report would not have succeeded if it were not for state funding. Clearly it is not the time to make a push for increased state funding.

But nevertheless, there is no clear slowdown in the activity in formal and non-formal adult education in general. The recession clearly has led people to rethink their career choices; not only people caught in the recession but also those concerned with the future impact of the recession are opting for some form of adult education.