



Flanders
State of the Art

Action plan on lifelong learning
**SETTING SAIL FOR A
LEARNING FLANDERS**

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PREFACE

The Lifelong Learning Partnership was tasked by the Government of Flanders to transform Flanders into a learning society by focusing on synergies and collaboration in the field of lifelong learning and by formulating joint ambitions that will be translated into an action plan. The Learning Society concept paper was the starting point.

This action plan is the result of a co-creative process that started in the autumn of 2020 and in which members of the Lifelong Learning Partnership ([appendix 2](#)) discussed ambitions and actions, which were based on input from working groups, information about existing initiatives and experiences within their own field of work. The action plan gradually took shape through a fascinating iterative process. The path we followed is at least as important as the resulting action plan: indeed, lifelong learning is a very broad and complex topic. Achieving a cultural change requires more than just a few individual actions. A shared vision and cooperation are crucial in this respect.

Understanding each other's perspective and the shared commitment within the Partnership grew in recent months as ideas, visions and feedback were exchanged. This was not always easy. Differences in views, backgrounds and interests became apparent throughout the process. But this was also important in order to find a common language and to obtain a clear idea of the steps needed in the coming years to distill a culture of lifelong learning from these rich perspectives.

The Partnership has listed ten ambitions consisting of some 16 actions that were discussed and submitted by the working groups and by members of the Partnership. A thorough exercise in efficiency and coherence by the administrations from the Work & Social Economy and Education & Training policy areas showed the overlap with existing or planned initiatives and the mutual links between actions. This revealed that several of the proposed actions (partly) overlap with initiatives that are already in progress or were recently launched, including those in the context of the recovery measures.

In light of this, the Partnership has chosen to focus on developing a coherent framework, detecting levers and barriers, and formulating priority actions rather than creating a new list of actions. This has resulted in this action plan in which we propose seven flagships that each consist of a set of actions that we believe will leverage an acceleration of lifelong learning. As a Partnership, our goal is to start a movement, focusing on connecting and motivating, on integrating and strengthening, on activating and demonstrating rather than on developing new policies.



This is rooted in our own operations and collaboration, and builds bridges across fields of expertise and sectors. The action plan is therefore a starting point rather than an end point and not everyone will necessarily agree across the board with the full text of the action plan.

However, most importantly we must agree on the horizon we have in our sights, the compass we will use, and the flagships we want to board to set sail for a learning Flanders. And above all, we must agree that we will only reach our destination by further engaging in (critical) discussion, by taking and sharing perspective, and converting vision into action.

We cannot achieve the latter alone. This action plan is therefore also an appeal to all stakeholders to join forces across the board and support a mobilising project to make Flanders a learning society. It is in this capacity that we would like to present this action plan to the Government of Flanders, which will consider our proposal in cooperation with the advisory councils.

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INTRODUCTION

Our society is more than ever in flux: the labour market, the economy, the social fabric and our personal lives are constantly subject to change and uncertainty as a result of technological developments, demographic changes, globalisation, climate change, etc. The corona crisis has highlighted this all the more. In other words, our society faces many challenges.

The extent to which and how we as individuals, as organisations and as a society will be able to deal with these challenges will be determined to a great extent by how we handle competencies, one of our most important assets. After all, human capital is the most important resource in our knowledge-based economy in order to strengthen the potential for innovation and productivity in our economy. At the same time, it is a powerful buffer against new social risks and a lever for personal development and fulfilment, ensuring that no one is left behind. A learning society is indeed more productive, more prosperous and happier, and also better equipped to deal with the many social, economic and environmental challenges it faces.

Unfortunately, Flanders has not yet cultivated a strong learning culture, neither in individuals, nor in organisations or society as a whole. Flanders scores poorly in the statistics for lifelong learning. After their initial education, people are generally not inclined to continue learning or upskill; this may be due to unfavourable learning experiences in the past or to a lack of time or money. This low level of willingness is worrying according to the OECD because it is a determining factor for participation in lifelong learning. It is also worrying that those who could benefit most from learning are the least likely to participate.

In other words, a transformation is required. We must all strive to create a true learning culture for training, retraining and orientation throughout our career in order to move towards a learning and eager-to-learn society. Everyone, citizens and organisations alike, must become eager to learn. A society where everyone, without distinction, has the opportunity to learn formally, non-formally or informally, where competencies are better utilised and valorised, and where people are guided towards and in learning. The Lifelong Learning Partnership intends to contribute to this transformation with this action plan.

This action plan aims to provide a **coherent and mobilising framework**, an **open roadmap** for the policy and the many stakeholders in lifelong learning in order to step up the pace in the coming years.

- Our **horizon** is 2030, in line with the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights. **We subscribe to the European ambition to achieve a training participation rate of 60% (for (non-)formal learning according to the 12-month indicator, see below).** Not as the only and soul-saving objective, but as a measure for the learning society.



- Our **compass** consists of ten ambitions that can place us at the forefront in Europe. They are the guiding principles behind current actions and provide direction for new ones.
- Our **flagships** are the initiatives we are presenting to start moving forward during this legislature. Training and education providers, employers, industry sectors, various authorities and government institutions (at different levels of competence) have often taken laudable initiatives in recent years to stimulate lifelong learning. In other words, we do not have to start from scratch. These are actions that we believe will act as leverage in the short term. We have added some actions for ourselves and the Centre of Expertise for Innovative Learning Pathways.

The Partnership puts forward these actions, ambitions and flagships to contribute to a strong(er) learning culture in Flanders. We consider this action plan to be an open and dynamic plan that must be developed further and given substance in the coming years, together with the many stakeholders and partners who are active in the broad field of lifelong learning. We will take stock at the end of this legislature and indicate how the actions, flagships and ambitions have developed and how we should proceed with them.

For the Partnership, contributing to this transformation is more than following up and monitoring the proposed actions and engaging in dialogue with the many stakeholders. Bringing the flagships up to full speed will require significant study, action and consultation. As a Partnership, we want to help underpin this necessary transformation by developing a systemic vision of lifelong learning. It is an exercise that we have initiated with this action plan and now want to continue and develop further. In this way, we want to ensure that Flanders sets the course for tomorrow's learning society.



FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

Flanders lacks a real learning culture. After their initial education, people are generally not or only slightly inclined to pursue further training or retraining – a phenomenon that is particularly acute among those who need it most. They often do not see the need for it or encounter certain barriers.

E.A. = EUROPEAN AVERAGE

LFS (2020) 25–64 years
Formal & non-formal

12-MONTH INDICATOR
(ACCESS)

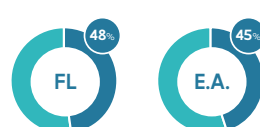


4-WEEK INDICATOR
(INTENSITY)



AES (2016) 25–64 years
Formal & non-formal

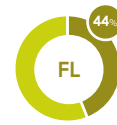
12-MONTH INDICATOR
(ACCESS)



FORMAL



NON-FORMAL



INFORMAL



groups with barriers



For some target groups (e.g. the over-55s, the non-working population and the low-qualified) the barriers to participation in lifelong learning are too high.

TRANSITION



A learning society has, however, never been more important. Technology is changing how we live and work. The ageing population, the digital revolution and the green transition are on the horizon. In an era of constant change, it is difficult to predict which competencies will be needed most. Lifelong learning is crucial for making people agile and resilient.

HORIZON

Our horizon is 2030. Our intention is to reach a training participation rate of 60%, in line with the European ambition. Not as the only and soul-saving objective, but as a measure for the learning society.



FLAGSHIPS



Our seven flagships are the initiatives that we will focus on during this legislature at the level of the learner, the organisation, the offering and society as a whole. We believe these actions can have a leveraging effect and are therefore crucial steps in removing barriers and moving towards a learning culture in Flanders.

COMPASS



Our compass consists of ten ambitions: learner-centred, LLL competency, inclusive learning, quality, transparency, alignment, collaboration, on-the-job learning and working while learning, knowledge, and technology. They are the guiding principles on which this action plan is built and they guide the actions towards the flagships and future actions.

LIFELONG LEARNING PARTNERSHIP



With this action plan, we want to set the course for a learning Flanders by offering a coherent framework and an open roadmap. The focus is on sharing knowledge, integrating and strengthening existing initiatives and connecting and mobilising actors to support lifelong learning in Flanders.

COMMON CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We will formulate a common conceptual framework. This is necessary to understand this text, but also to speak the same language when this action plan is rolled out.

Learning mediators | People who are active in organisations and close to potential learners and who take a role in raising awareness, informing and stimulating learning. They are active in various learning contexts (in the workplace, mediation, education, etc.) and thus come into contact with different target groups. From their position of trust and confidence, they can quickly and easily address remediable learning barriers or they can overcome these barriers that are more difficult to address through more formal channels.

Recognition of competencies | 1) The general process of awarding official status to competencies that are either formally acquired (through the awarding of certificates or diplomas) or are acquired in a non-formal or informal setting (through the awarding of equivalence, credit points, or validation of acquired competencies) (this is the formal recognition).
2) The recognition of the value of competencies by economic and social actors (this is the social recognition) (European Commission, 2001).

RAC | Recognition of acquired competencies.
An individual has to go through four successive stages to achieve recognition of acquired competencies.

1. Identification: becoming aware of and naming competencies
2. Documentation: making competencies visible and substantiating them with documentary evidence
3. Assessment: evaluating competencies on the basis of a formal reference framework
4. Certification: formal recognition of competencies, based on the results of the competencies assessment.

The recent integrated RAC policy ([2019 regulations](#)) applies to the vocational qualification RAC profiles that consist of the assessment and the certification (steps 3 and 4) of competencies from a vocational qualification.



Empowerment | The process of empowering people with the responsibility to develop initiatives in order to shape their own lives and the lives of the communities to which they belong and of society as a whole economically, socially and politically (European Commission, 2001).

Competency | The ability to make effective use of experience, knowledge and qualifications (European Commission, 2001). The decree of 30 April 2009 on the qualification structure describes competency in Article 2(6) as follows: 'the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to social activities in an integrated manner'.

Barriers

Dispositional barriers | These barriers are more likely to be psychological barriers to learning, such as negative learning experiences, health and age (Van Langenhove & Vansteenkiste, 2020).

Institutional barriers | Barriers related to the training and education system. For example, the place of training may be difficult to reach or a person may not meet the requirements. The cost of training also constitutes an institutional barrier but is discussed separately here as a financial barrier (Van Langenhove & Vansteenkiste, 2020).

Situational barriers | Barriers related to a person's situation, such as the work and family situation. The situational barriers are subdivided into lack of time (due to work and/or family situation) and lack of support from the employer or VDAB (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training) (Van Langenhove & Vansteenkiste, 2020).

Informational barriers | Informational barriers refer to the availability of information on the training offering, the benefits of learning and possible training incentives. The interaction between supply and demand of learning opportunities is subject to the learners' skills and abilities to find and interpret this information. Digital barriers may play a role here. (OECD, 2005; Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013; Van De Broeck & Bloemen, 2013).



E-learning	Umbrella term defined as learning by means of information and communication technology (ICT) and the internet. e-Learning consists of two different forms: online learning and blended learning (Lembrechts et al. 2020).
Blended learning	A conscious combination of a face-to-face offering and an online component (Lembrechts et al. 2020).
Online learning	Distance learning that is (almost) entirely online: none or only a minimum number of face-to-face contacts with the teacher or the other learners are provided (Lembrechts et al. 2020).
Learning types	
Formal learning	Learning that normally takes place in an educational and training institution, has a structured form (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leads to certificates and diplomas. From the learner's point of view, formal learning takes place with a certain intention (European Commission, 2001). Usually, these are courses with a longer duration (Van Langenhove et al., 2020).
Informal learning	Learning that results from daily activities at work, in the family or in leisure time. This type of learning is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and does not normally lead to a certificate or diploma. The learning may be intentional, but in most cases there is no intention (learning is "incidental" or accidental) (European Commission, 2001). People can learn from colleagues, in the family, from conversations with experts or they can study independently by looking up information in books or on the internet (Van Langenhove et al., 2020).
Non-formal learning	This type of learning does not take place in an educational or training institution and does not normally lead to a certificate or diploma. This type of learning is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). From the learner's point of view, non-formal learning takes place with a certain intention (European Commission, 2001). In the case of non-formal learning, the training is short and less structured compared to formal training (Van Langenhove et al., 2020).



Learning competency	Attention is paid to the regulation of learning opinions, processes and results, research competencies, problem-solving and critical thinking, information processing and collaboration (key competency).
Learning ecosystem	A network of inter-connected relationships that give structure to lifelong learning. Learning ecosystems are diverse, dynamic and evolving, and they connect learners and the community to stimulate individual and collective capacity. They have three goals which are dedicated to co-creating thriving futures for people, places and our planet (Spencer-Keyse et al., 2020).
Learning and career guidance	A range of activities that aim to help people make decisions in their lives (regarding their education, career and personal choices) and implement those decisions. Designated as "study and vocational guidance information, guidance and counselling" by the European Commission (2001).
Learning job	A job that enables an employee to use and further develop his/her competencies and talents. This learning and development is mainly but not exclusively on an informal basis: on-the-job, by working (together) with others, or within the context of the (learning) organisation. The organisation of work (distribution of tasks and responsibilities in an organisation) determines the job content and the extent of the learning potential, i.e. the extent to which a job is motivating and challenging on the one hand, but has sufficient freedom (autonomy) and learning opportunities on the other. Learning jobs have a positive impact on workability, work capability, agility and mobility of employees.



Learning organisation	An organisation that stimulates learning at all levels (individual and collective) and, as a result, continually develops itself (European Commission, 2001). Organisations with a learning capacity that enables them to develop the knowledge they require in a changing internal and/or external context and to develop and utilise the competencies and talents of their members. In this way, they can continue to achieve their mission and goals (Baert et al., 2011).
Learning capacity	The ability of an organisation to continuously develop (1), absorb (2), disseminate (3) and exploit (4) knowledge through learning processes, thereby responding to a changing internal and/or external context (Baert et al., 2011).
Lifelong learning	All learning activity (formal, non-formal and informal) undertaken throughout an adult's life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. The intention or objective to learn is the critical point that distinguishes these activities from non-learning activities (European Commission, 2001). Lifelong learning means all forms of learning activities undertaken by adults after completing their initial education, irrespective of the level (including higher education) (European Commission, 2006).
LLL competency	The LLL competency ensures that individuals and organisations are and remain employable, eager to learn and resilient. They have the capacity for self-reflection and can formulate learning needs.



1 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN FLANDERS

As indicated in the introduction, lifelong learning in Flanders faces a number of challenges. [Appendix 1](#) explains the relevant figures and results of recent studies on lifelong learning in Flanders in an extensive environmental analysis. Here we summarise the most important findings.



Figure 1 Training participation in Flanders

Lifelong learning consists of both education (formal and non-formal learning) and informal learning in or outside the workplace. The latter is most common according to the Adult Education Survey (AES). In 2016, 63.4% of adults in Flanders participated in informal learning. Non-formal learning ranks second with 44.4%, followed by formal learning (6.8%). With these figures, Flanders scores rather poorly compared to other European countries. In respect of participation in formal learning, Flanders scores even lower than the European average (OECD, 2019, based on PIAAC 2012/2015).

This picture for participation in formal and non-formal learning is also confirmed by other sources. According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), 8% (per four weeks) of the Flemish population aged between 25 and 64 participated in formal or non-formal learning for work or private purposes in 2020. This is far below some of Flanders neighbours (Netherlands: 19%, Luxembourg: 16%). Moreover, sources that gauge training participation in the past 12 months indicate that Flanders is only a middle tier player in Europe. This is confirmed in the AES (Flanders 48% and Europe 45%), PIAAC (Flanders 49% and Europe 51%) and ESJS (Belgium 69% and Europe 67%). The CVTS and EWCS provide a more positive picture for Belgium: participation according to the CVTS in Belgium is 52% and higher than the European average of 41%, and this is also the case according to the EWCS with 49% and 41% respectively.

The main reasons why people participate in lifelong learning appear to be work-related (AES, 2016; Statistics Flanders, 2021). The reasons also vary according to the type of learning.

However, training participation is distributed very unevenly in Flanders. Irrespective of the reference period taken into account, the over 55s, the low-qualified and the non-working population are less likely to participate in training. Moreover, 15% of adults in Flanders are functionally illiterate. The Matthew effect is therefore a focus point for several researchers (OECD, 2019/2021; Van Langenhove et al. 2020; Martin, 2018), lifelong learning is particularly important for vulnerable groups. Training participation also differs by company size and sector of employment (Van Langenhove et al., 2020). Participation in job-related (non-)formal training is lower in smaller companies and among adults with temporary contracts (OECD, 2019).

Individuals may experience several barriers to participating in training (Van Langenhove et al., 2020, based on AES 2016). While high-qualified workers and 25–34-year-olds say that a lack of time is the main barrier, low-qualified workers, the unemployed, the non-working population and over 55s experience dispositional barriers more often than average. Unemployed people also experience more institutional barriers than average. Financial barriers play on average less of a role, since Flanders has various financial incentives for individuals and employers to reduce (direct and indirect) training costs. However, the Matthew effect also applies here: for example low-qualified workers and older adults make less use of career vouchers and training credits (OECD 2021). Finally, unequal access to information is also an important barrier to training participation. Vulnerable target groups in particular receive less information about training than other social categories.

The OECD concluded in its Skills Strategy (2019) that Flanders lacks a learning culture. Compared to other OECD countries and regions, Flanders is at the bottom of the OECD indicator for learning culture. There is a relatively large group in Flanders that does not want to learn (AES, 2016): 41.9% did not participate and do not want to participate. This score is in line with the EU-28 average (42.8%) but is significantly higher than, for example, the Netherlands (27%) (OECD, 2021). The differences according to level of education, age and employment status can be observed here too. For example, the willingness to follow training is more than twice as low



among low-qualified workers compared to high-qualified labour, and the willingness among the over 55s and the non-working population is also lower. The dispositional barriers they experience (self-image and identity) are a higher barrier than situational barriers, but at the same time they are less easy to measure and address (CEDEFOP, 2016).

The main reason for not wanting to pursue training is that individuals do not feel the need to do so (OECD, 2019). Approximately a quarter of the population does not participate in training for this reason, a percentage that increases for low-qualified workers, over 55s and the non-working population.

In contrast to these figures, the labour market is changing rapidly, with an increasing demand for high-qualified labour for knowledge professions on the one hand and a growing number of vacancies for shortage occupations on the other (De Smet et al., 2021; De Vos et al., 2021). However, robotisation, the digital, technological and green revolution are leading to certain professions becoming less important (Oppenheimer, 2019). According to the OECD Skills Strategy, 14% of current jobs in Flanders have a high chance of being automated, while another 29% of jobs are facing significant changes due to automation. It is also difficult to predict which professions will be most in demand in ten years' time, and which sectors will undergo the greatest changes.

This highlights the importance of lifelong learning: both for society and for the individuals involved, the importance of training and retraining and of being able to respond more flexibly to these changes will only increase, among other things, by developing "transversal skills", i.e. skills that can be used and applied in different contexts (OECD, 2021). Responding to digital and green transitions will also require specific technical competencies, including STEM competencies (Roland Berger, 2021) and digital skills (OECD, 2021).



2 OUR HORIZON

In May 2021, the European Union set three targets for 2030 as part of the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights. **One of them is participation in further education (in the last 12 months), with a target for it to increase to 60%.**

The European average is almost 40% while the target is 60%. None of the Member States currently meets this target. Sweden is the best performer in the European Union at 58.8%. In 2016, Flanders recorded a training participation rate of 47.7% for formal and non-formal learning according to the AES.¹

The Lifelong Learning Partnership believes that Flanders can evolve to rank among the best in Europe in lifelong learning. It therefore subscribes to the European ambition to reach a training participation rate (formal and non-formal learning) of 60% by 2030.

Training participation is however only a partial indicator of the results from these efforts; setting our course for a learning Flanders means more than training participation in formal and non-formal learning. The career and competency mindset that we would like to see more firmly established in Flanders is broader than training participation alone. Informal learning must also be strengthened further throughout one's career.

We have therefore formulated in this respect the ambition to develop a broader LLL dashboard, with various indicators that we would like to see evolve in a favourable direction in the coming years, in line with our strategy and regarding the individual, the organisation, the offering and society as a whole. We have defined an road map with possible milestones for each indicator. We pay particular attention to certain target groups and barriers.

Moreover, the Partnership does not consider lifelong learning as an end in itself, but as an important means of achieving personal, social and economic objectives. In this sense, increased participation in lifelong learning should also translate into higher employment rates, stronger socio-economic participation and more agility on the part of individuals and organisations in light of the major transformations we are facing as a society.

The environmental analysis shows that individuals and organisations experience numerous barriers to lifelong learning. For example, Flanders is still confronted with low literacy. The Partnership therefore believes identifying and removing barriers is a task that should be included in all actions and explicitly addressed in the road map.

¹ The European Pillar currently relies on the AES (Adult Education Survey) as its source. However, the European Commission is considering using the LFS (Labour Force Survey) as a source in the future (for example, it is published annually, while AES is only every 5 or 6 years). Measured according to the LFS, our training participation today is only 21%.

3 OUR COMPASS

The Lifelong Learning Partnership fully identifies with the principles and starting points included in the The Learning Society concept paper. However, we also felt the need – before working out concrete actions and initiatives and irrespective of our backgrounds, positions and individual perspectives – to define a shared vision of the direction we as a Partnership want to take towards lifelong learning in Flanders.

We sought and found the shared ambitions that seem important to us all to make a great leap forward. We described the ten ambitions below that we believe can bring about a breakthrough in the transition to a learning society. They are the compass that will guide the current and future actions that we want to develop.



The learner is at the centre of his/her environment(s)

We focus on the learner with his/her learning needs and opportunities, and the barriers he/she experiences in LLL, to effectively make a difference. We do not lose sight of the needs of organisations, employers and society. The learning system must ensure that people want to learn, can learn, are allowed to learn and sometimes must learn. Wanting to learn is the goal. However, individuals sometimes need to be made accountable to (make time to) learn and they need more support in this respect. In other words, other stakeholders in the lifelong learning ecosystem bear responsibility (multi-actor perspective) in addition to the individual. Consequently, the (shared) responsibility must be approached in a differentiated way.



Develop the LLL competency and continue to create awareness of and mobilise the concept of lifelong learning

The LLL competency ensures that individuals and organisations are and remain employable, eager-to-learn and resilient. People have the capacity for self-reflection and can recognise and formulate learning needs so that they can take their life/career and competency enhancement into their own hands. In addition, we must create greater awareness for the true meaning of (lifelong) learning, make it explicit and visible, also among target groups that we do not reach at all or not sufficiently, and starting in the initial stages of education. So everyone should know that you can learn everywhere, also outside the school context. Individuals and organisations must develop a broad view of what learning can entail, its different forms, and how much time and commitment it requires. We encourage both career learning and life-wide learning.



Focus on inclusive learning

Every learner or organisation experiences barriers to a greater or lesser extent. The LLP wants every individual, every group and every organisation to be able to learn anytime, anywhere, regardless of status, age, background or size of organisation. LLL must be raised for all (small) organisations and all target groups. Everyone receives adequate support and guidance. The different barriers are identified and eliminated as much as possible, including the Matthew effect.





Continue to provide quality Both the offering and the guidance are of good quality, adapted to the adult target group and call for repeated participation, because learning has a positive impact on the life of the learner, the organisation and society as a whole.

Teachers, lecturers, professors, mentors, trainers and assistants must – and can – continue to train themselves so they can provide high-quality programmes and guidance.



Generate more impact by providing more transparency The offering of learning activities and guidance and their quality, costs and, where appropriate, incentives and levels of authority and management are transparent to the learner and the learning organisation.

Citizens and organisations know where, with whom and when to find an offering of learning activities and guidance and what that offering, with any links/learning ladders, will lead to (e.g. qualification, diploma, certificate, micro-credential or badge). In other words, learners know what they will have at the end of a learning activity and how this will be useful in their (life) career. It is also clear to the learner and the organisation how the quality of learning activities is ensured.



Agile and sustainable alignment To build an agile and sustainable learning system for a society in transition, the current and future (competency) demands of both learners and organisations, and by extension the labour market and society, must be mapped out.

Which skills are on the rise? What needs do our companies and organisations require? We are creating responsive, agile skills systems in response to upskilling, retraining and reorientation. This allows us to minimise the risks of (vulnerable) citizens dropping out of the labour market and society.



Cooperation with impact Competition and partitions give way to complementarity and openness. Instead of everyone working out their own training programme, we are looking for future-oriented partnerships to strengthen the impact of the offering (and the civil effect) across companies, industry sectors and training providers. We apply the same reasoning to the offering of guidance. We do this with a clear and respectful role for all stakeholders.



Reinforce on-the-job learning and working while learning We want people to actively shape their careers through learning and competency enhancement, starting from their own interests, talents and needs. Competencies serve as an essential ingredient for a sustainable career, and the career is at the same time the engine of competency development.

How much time can be freed up so that learning can take place in combination with one's job, family life and care responsibilities or commitments. Learning guidance and learning as a structural part of the career policy are the cornerstones of this concept. We also focus on innovative and/or flexible learning paths, informal learning, learning jobs in learning organisations, and we encourage (job) mobility in terms of industry sector, employer, function, team, task and role, in order to learn on the job in different contexts. A learning culture is inherent in every organisation where working is learning and vice versa.





Develop monitoring tools and collective knowledge

In order to raise awareness and mobilise people effectively and responsibly, it is necessary to know where things are running smoothly and what the specific barriers and levers are to achieve a learning society. Expanding our collective knowledge and setting up effective monitoring of lifelong learning are indispensable for this.



Implementing technology in and through learning

Through lifelong learning, we enable technology, digitisation and data science to be (more widely) adopted by businesses and citizens. We also want to make optimal and meaningful use of technology and digitalisation for lifelong learning, both in terms of content and support for the offering, guidance, governance, etc. The use of technology does not become an end in itself. There will always be (learning) contexts where deploying technology is less useful or pedagogically inappropriate, and digital skills still need to be developed and/or the infrastructure provided for some target groups.



4 OUR FLAGSHIPS

To set a course to a learning Flanders, the Lifelong Learning Partnership proposes seven flagships that each consist of a set of actions that we believe will leverage an acceleration of lifelong learning.

Our focus is on connecting and enthusing, on integrating and strengthening, on activating and demonstrating rather than on developing new policies. In doing so, we assume an active or catalytic role. Our flagships form the outline of a movement that contributes – directly or indirectly – to a culture of learning throughout one’s career, for individuals, organisations, training and education providers as well as government and society. We also provide a framework that all players can use to contribute to a learning Flanders with their expertise and initiatives.

4.1 THE FRAMEWORK: THE LLL MATRIX

We developed a three-dimensional matrix in which actions have a place. This matrix forms the strategic (starting) framework for the Lifelong Learning Partnership and has four objectives. Firstly, through the three dimensions, the matrix aims to make tangible how we want to and can realise the ambitions of the compass. Secondly, the purpose of the matrix is to identify the overlap and complementarity of existing and planned initiatives and to detect policy gaps. Thirdly, the matrix forms a framework to prioritise and group actions under the flagships and, finally, the matrix explains how both the Government of Flanders and the Partnership play a role in their realisation.

The matrix consists of four different target groups (horizontal axis) and five different (action) streams (vertical axis), which are operationalised by the flagships and the actions under them. The actions are indicated as flags, with actions initiated by the Government of Flanders² are purple and actions initiated by the Partnership are blue³. In addition, all actions, flagships and action streams have a third dimension that focuses on the barriers that individuals and organisations may encounter. This is an underlying theme throughout the action plan.

² The departments and agencies mentioned, e.g. E&T or VDAB, act as initiators. This does not exclude the involvement of other stakeholders.

³ The Centre of Expertise for Innovative Learning Pathways supports the Partnership in its actions and is the initiator of a number of actions.

4.1.1 The first dimension: four (ambition) levels

On the horizontal axis of the matrix, we break down the **ambitions in different target groups** (from micro over meso to macro level).

- **The learning individual**, where the ambition is to encourage as many Flemish people as possible – with special attention for the most vulnerable – to learn, to make them aware of the importance of learning, and to teach them the LLL competency(ies) as much as possible in the light of the learning society.
- **The learning organisation**, where the ambition is to create learning jobs in learning organisations, on-the-job learning and working while learning, organisations where working is learning and vice versa.
- **The learning offering**, where the ambition is also to better attune the training offering to the needs of individuals and organisations, now and in the future, to give shape to high-quality, innovative and flexible learning paths (with a contemporary use of technology in and through learning).
- **The learning society**, where the ambition is to achieve a shared vision, a coherent framework for action and a strong learning culture in society as a whole.

4.1.2 The second dimension: five (action) streams

On the vertical axis of the matrix, we outline **the five streams that can give us momentum** to realise these ambitions – for each of the target groups.

- **Stream 1 Develop Know-how** Despite the many (international) studies, good practices and data that exist in the field of lifelong learning, many gaps still remain in the available knowledge. The first stream for the Partnership is therefore the ongoing *development of expertise and knowledge in terms of lifelong learning* across policy areas, linked to disseminating and translating this knowledge into practice and policy regarding lifelong learning.
- **Stream 2 Raising awareness and mobilising** A second stream to realise our ambitions consists of *raising awareness and mobilising individuals, organisations and society as a whole*. We prefer a sufficiently targeted communication and incentive strategy to create awareness, motivation and eagerness to learn, to strengthen LLL competencies and to encourage everyone to take a step forward in lifelong learning – from early education to the workplace. We do not place the responsibility solely on the individual but also address organisations, training providers, (social) professionals, partnerships and the authorities.
- **Stream 3 Focus on competencies** The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants competencies to play a more central role in the economy and society of the future. *Identifying and analysing*

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the available and required competences (today and in the future) and then working with them is a crucial factor in the transformation towards a learning Flanders. This requires a strategic change over several years, in terms of individuals, jobs, organisations and providers of training, career and HR services.

- **Stream 4 Support and guidance** The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to make citizens, organisations and intermediaries as self-reliant as possible with regard to strengthening and working with competencies. To ensure that nobody is left behind and to tailor the offerings to the needs of the learner and the organisation, the Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to *develop layered guidance and support that is presented to all stakeholders in one story*.
- **Stream 5 Stimulate partnerships** We will only be able to navigate all the streams set out above if we succeed in creating a powerful partnership across the various levels, institutions, (policy) areas and stakeholders in lifelong learning, in which cooperation is the norm and impact the result. The Partnership wants to *help build these kinds of (local) partnerships and collaborations* by seeking innovative ecosystems and networks, but also by supporting existing ecosystems and networks. The aim is to bring stakeholders together on a regular basis for the purpose of professionalisation, shared knowledge and expertise building and sharing, co-creation and innovation in the field, and to learn from the planned projects.

4.1.3 The third dimension: underlying barriers to lifelong learning

The intersection of the levels (individual, organisation, supply, society) on the one hand, and the various streams (developing know-how, raising awareness and mobilising, focusing on competencies, support and guidance, and stimulating partnerships) on the other, already offers many opportunities to get started and organise relevant actions.

However, a third dimension is missing from this two-dimensional framework, namely the underlying barriers. Every learner, every organisation, every training provider experiences barriers that prevent them from engaging in (an inclusive approach to) lifelong learning. Barriers and obstacles to the aforementioned streams also exist at the level of society too.

For this reason, it is important that *we obtain a clear picture of the barriers – at all levels and for all action streams – and eliminate the barriers* by means of a third underlying dimension that also plays a central role in the matrix. The Partnership believes one core task consists in better research, understand and make visible these barriers, and to work on removing them wherever possible, whether these barriers relate to time for learning, financial barriers, regulatory barriers or the transparency of the offering.

In the same way, we are aware in particular of *disadvantaged groups in lifelong learning*, who experience disproportionate barriers and to whom we shall pay special attention in every action and across the streams and levels. Indeed, one of the central ambitions of our action



plan (see above 3) is to focus on solid learning ladders for the most vulnerable target groups, so that learning becomes inclusive and customised for everyone.



Identifying and eliminating BARRIERS

LEVEL



LEARNING INDIVIDUAL

Encouraging learning, raising awareness and acquiring LLL competency.



LEARNING ORGANISATION

Learning jobs in learning organisations, on-the-job learning and working while learning.



LEARNING OFFERING

Quality, tailor-made, innovative and flexible offerings.



LEARNING SOCIETY







Shared vision, coherent action framework and strong learning culture.

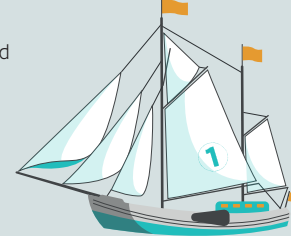
STREAM 1

Developing know-how

FLAGSHIP 1 – TOWARDS A KNOWLEDGE AGENDA FOR LLL

The LLP ensures that insights flow forward, are shared and supported and that they are transformed into innovative breakthroughs and solutions.

-  (DWSE+O&V) Future perspectives on learning, living and working
-  (Centre of Expertise) LLL dashboard
-  (Centre of Expertise) Flemish skills outlook
-  (Centre of Expertise) Research agenda for lifelong learning
-  (LLP) Disseminate and use results from the research agenda
-  (LLP) Develop a systemic vision of lifelong learning






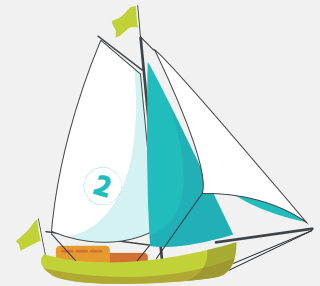
STREAM 2

Raising awareness and providing incentives

FLAGSHIP 2 – TOWARDS A SEGMENTED MOBILISATION STRATEGY




The PLL initiates a mobilisation strategy that addresses and connects every citizen, organisation and partnership, with their own barriers and needs, on the path to a learning Flanders.

-  (Centre of Expertise+O&V) Website The Learning Society
-  (Centre of Expertise+O&V) Targeted strategy towards hard-to-reach individuals and organisations
-  (Centre of Expertise+R&D) Mobilising events



FLAGSHIP 3 – INVESTIGATE A PERSON-CENTRED USE OF FLEMISH LLL INCENTIVES

The LLP is gradually moving towards a person-centred system of lifelong learning for transparent and coherent use of incentives.

-  (DWSE) Learning and career account
-  (DWSE) Overview of training incentives
-  (LLP) Analysis of personalised use of LLL incentives










STREAM 3

Putting competencies first

FLAGSHIP 4 – TOWARDS A SINGLE FLEMISH STRATEGIC COMPETENCY PROGRAMME

The LLP works in a coordinated way to strengthen the competencies of all citizens and puts competencies at the heart of the learning economy and society.

-  (DWSE) Macro competency prognoses
-  (DWSE) Competency checks on employees
-  (VDAB) Personalised career platform and competency overview
-  (O&V) Learning and experience evidence database (LED)
-  (VDAB+O&V) Promote interoperability of competency languages
-  (O&V+DWSE+VDAB) Integrated RAC policy
-  (LLP) Follow-up of policy actions depending on barriers and gaps



LEGEND



LLP/Centre of Expertise



Flemish Government

STREAM 4




Supporting and guiding










FLAGSHIP 5 – GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT OF LLL DEVELOP ACCOMPANYING POLICY

The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to make citizens, organisations and intermediaries as self-reliant as possible when working with competencies and therefore focuses on a more coherent framework of guidance and support.





WAVE 1 – DIGITAL TOOLS AND ACCESS

-  (VDAB) Career platform
-  (ESF) Public procurement leergoesting (eager to learn)
-  (LLP) Digital support tools

WAVE 2 – (INFORMAL/ORGANIC) SERVICES CLOSE TO INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS







-  (ESF) Support offering for learning jobs in learning organisations
-  (ESF) Assignment – eager to learn with coaching paths for companies and their employees
-  (ESF) Coaching instrument for learning organisations
-  (ESF) Competency check plan for SMEs
-  (LLP) Investigate the role of mediators for lifelong learning
-  (LLP) Investigate accessible conversation methodology
-  (LLP) Second-line support analysis

WAVE 3 – EXTERNAL/STRUCTURED SERVICES

-  (O&V+DWSE+VDAB) Regional cooperation of learning shops with local partners
-  (VDAB) Career counselling (via career vouchers)
-  (DWSE) Initiatives for support of second half of career
-  (LLP) Third-line support analysis

FLAGSHIP 6 – GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

The LLP supports training providers in shaping contemporary, high-quality, flexible and innovative offerings.

-  (O&V) Developing the training compass
-  (O&V) Coaching training for teachers and lecturers
-  (DWSE+VDAB+O&V) Support training providers transition for e-learning
-  (DWSE+O&V) Support for learners with a digital disadvantage
-  (VLAIO) Innovation projects in VLAIO network
-  (LLP) Targeted recommendations LLL instruments











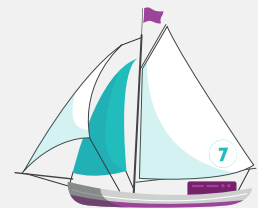
STREAM 5

Encourage partnerships

FLAGSHIP 7 – STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS FOR LEARNING IN A FUTURE-ORIENTED WAY

The LLP aspires to create powerful partnerships across the various levels, institutions and stakeholders of LLL, to strengthen lifelong learning in Flanders in a future-oriented way.

-  (DWSE+SERV) Action plan for inter-sectoral advisors
-  (ESF) Local learning ecosystems project
-  (VLAIO) Co-creation in training and education offerings
-  (DWSE) in dialogue with the federal government
-  (LLP) Promoting partnerships and helping to make them sustainable
-  (LLP) Encouraging the evolution from training funds to career funds
-  (LLP) Connect with other LLL platforms and initiatives
-  (LLP) Alignment with initial education depending on the LLL competencies



4.2 THE LLP FLAGSHIPS

The comprehensive LLL matrix provides insight into what we believe is needed to create a learning culture in Flanders and to provide a foundation to devise concrete actions aimed at specific streams and/or levels.

We propose seven flagships that cluster a variety of actions/projects that we, the Lifelong Learning Partnership, should focus on during this term.

We emphasise that these flagships do not stand alone and may only make sense when linked with other flagships. As such, the awareness-raising project is only meaningful when it is related to challenges, such as the development of learning guidance. The developed know-how is passed on to the other flagships.

Flagship 1 Towards a knowledge agenda for lifelong learning

Ambition(s): Knowledge and monitoring

The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to contribute during this legislature to a meaningful and aligned knowledge agenda for lifelong learning in Flanders. Not only do we want to use the expertise centre to set up an effective monitoring and research programme for lifelong learning, we are also committed to valorising and passing on knowledge developed elsewhere to policymakers and the LLL landscape. We are also interested in what exists and new developments internationally on this subject. In this way, we ensure that insights are passed on, shared and supported, and that they can be transformed into innovative breakthroughs and solutions and lead to a new systemic vision of LLL. In this knowledge agenda, we pay particular attention to the possible barriers among individuals, organisations, the offering and society, and how we can overcome them.

A knowledge agenda is crucial for mobilising policy and stakeholders in the field, for benchmarking, and to define and fine-tune strategies where necessary. Just as important as the research itself is the strategic discussion that we in the LLP want to link to the results – across the boundaries of education and work, and involving other domains and stakeholders. We want to work towards a new systemic vision of LLL that underpins the necessary transformation.



- (DWSE-E&T) In the context of vision 2050, we also continue to focus on **long-term future studies** of learning, living and working.
- (Centre of Expertise) Develop **an LLL dashboard** where key indicators, including skills, are brought together and updated.

- 🚩 (Centre of Expertise) Develop a periodic **Flemish skills outlook** that maps the most important challenges and knowledge about competencies/life-long learning on the basis of existing and innovative data sources (e.g. macro competency forecasts).
- 🚩 (Centre of Expertise) Prepare and implement a relevant **research agenda for lifelong learning**, and adjust and make it accessible where necessary. All the survey results are used to distil actions and inform and mobilise stakeholders. The following topics are addressed non-exhaustively:
 - customer journeys of different customer groups within LLL
 - charter the ecosystem
 - review the funding of lifelong learning
 - screen regulatory barriers and opportunities
 - research into crucial touchpoints
 - research into learning organisations and learning jobs
 - inventory of interview methods (see below)
 - additional research into barriers
 - research into LLL as a fundamental right (with stakeholder debate)
 - secure and bring together European and international research
 - develop a segmentation model in cooperation with the OECD
 - ...
- 🚩 (LLP) The Partnership **uses the results** of the research agenda on lifelong learning to substantiate or adjust existing actions and to develop new actions in line with a vision supported by the Partnership. Members of the Partnership also contribute to the **broad dissemination of research results** in their own organisation, networks and work.
- 🚩 (LLP) The Partnership works on a **shared vision** to further shape **systemic change**.



Flagship 2 Towards a segmented mobilisation strategy

Ambition(s): LLL competency, Transparency, Inclusive learning

To stimulate willingness and eagerness to learn among the public, organisations and in the broad landscape of stakeholders who can play a role, including the (sectoral) social partners and education and training stakeholders, we have initiated a transversal awareness-raising and mobilisation project. This project is aimed at putting as many Flemish people as possible into learning and at mobilising and facilitating stakeholders in the organisation of lifelong learning. Within this project, we see efforts in the field of communication in order to reach certain target groups that face difficulties in learning today and to make them take the step towards lifelong learning with targeted arguments and stories and the prospect of a LLL-offering (and LL-services).

We work directly but also indirectly (via facilitators, etc.) with citizens and organisations, taking into account the learning needs and barriers they experience. We want to share and disseminate the success stories as much as possible and make the existing knowledge available (see above) so that as many stakeholders as possible can find tools to get started. We aim for



an oil slick effect, whereby lifelong learning increasingly spreads and takes off in Flanders. As a culmination of these efforts, we organise a lifelong learning festival in Flanders every two years.

The segmented mobilisation strategy pays special attention to the possible barriers faced by individuals, organisations, the offering and society, and how we can overcome them. We also rely as much as possible on the networks of LLP members to realise the actions.

- ❏ (Centre of Expertise+E&T) Develop a **website for The Learning Society** as an inspiring launchpad (knowledge, best practices, etc.) for citizens, organisations and intermediary stakeholders (training and education providers, local authorities, industry sectors, partnerships, etc.).

- ❏ (Centre of Expertise+E&T) Develop a targeted **outreach strategy – with stakeholders** – to individuals and organisations that are difficult to reach, aligned as much as possible with actions within the framework of the Flemish Resilience. This action will also take into account the other actions of our flagships in order to develop an integrated and segmented mobilisation strategy. Results from the OECD segmentation study and the customer journeys, among others, are used to maximum effect.
- ❏ (Centre of Expertise+E&T) Organise **mobilising events** for various stakeholders, including a lifelong learning festival every two years in Flanders, projects within the framework of Lifelong Learning and an international conference in 2024 (possibly in cooperation with VISITFLANDERS). We also rely on the networks of LLP members in this respect.



Flagship 3 Investigate a more person-centred use of the Flemish LLL incentives

Ambition(s): Learner-centred, LLL competency, Transparency, Inclusive learning

Related to the path for raising awareness and in addition to the mobilisation strategy, we also see a flagship for (financial) incentives that can stimulate people to learn. Today, the Government of Flanders is already using various incentives for individuals and organisations, including the temporary joint decision right, whereby employers can now also propose training for their employees within the framework of the Flemish training leave. Moreover, the Flemish Minister of Employment has the policy intention – underpinned by the framework of All hands on deck/Flemish Resilience – to develop a learning and career account together with the social partners. Some training funds are also taking initiatives in this direction.

The Lifelong Learning Partnership is watching these developments with great interest. In any case, as a first step, we believe in a model that makes existing rights (in terms of education, orientation and guidance) as transparent as possible for the individual and other lifelong learning stakeholders. A clear portfolio of rights tailored to the individual, with accompanying efforts for the most vulnerable target groups, is a possible second step. We want to keep an open mind as to whether a persistent use of personalised incentives (as a third step) can be a game-changer for the creation of a real learning culture supported by individuals and organisations, which would encourage individuals to take more initiative and ownership of their (learning) career.



The Partnership therefore links the (follow-up of) current actions within the Government of Flanders to the commitment to investigate a more efficient and personalised use of incentives. Special attention is paid to the possible barriers and how to overcome them.



- (DWSE) The Government of Flanders is giving shape to a **learning and career account** for the individual (within the framework of Flemish Resilience/All hands on deck) and is entering into dialogue with the federal government for this. The vision paper is expected in the course of 2022.
- (DWSE) As a step towards the learning and career account, a personalised **overview of the various training incentives** that the individual can make use of to strengthen his/her career will be provided.
- (LLP) The Partnership is **investigating the possible implementation and effects of personalised LLL incentives**. We take into account the entire education and training landscape and initiatives from all policy levels, including the federal level. We also consider an analysis of foreign examples and their possible impact as desirable. If necessary, we formulate recommendations addressed to the stakeholders and the authorities responsible for implementation.



Flagship 4 Towards a single Flemish strategic competency programme

Ambition(s): Alignment, Transparency, Knowledge and Monitoring

The Partnership sees a great strategic opportunity in making competencies more central as the backbone of a learning economy and society. The Partnership supports the recommendation of labour market experts who want to combine competency forecasting, competency checks, a competency portfolio and recommendation systems for training and career steps, with specific attention for basic competences, such as (digital) literacy.

Like the experts, the Partnership advocates a coordinated approach from a single strategic competency programme to strengthen the competencies of all citizens. Competency checks and competency portfolios contribute to the positioning of citizens and organisations on the labour market, given the changing nature of jobs and the impact on competencies, while the interoperability⁴ of different competency languages increases the transferability of competencies. Competency forecasts provide the compass to where competencies need to be strengthened, today and in the future. We also look explicitly at (changes in) jobs. After all, a possible redesign of jobs can offer new learning opportunities and ensure a better response to labour market trends or shortages.

⁴ **Interoperability** is the ability of different autonomous, heterogeneous units, systems, parties, organisations or individuals to cooperate, communicate and exchange information with each other.

At the same time, it remains important to continue to value and formally recognise (through certification) the competencies that people acquire in their professional career, voluntary work, hobbies or self-study. The further roll-out of the integrated RAC policy is a priority for lifelong learning.



The Government of Flanders is taking various actions to give shape to this, including in the implementation of the Flemish Resilience plan (All hands on deck, Edusprong, etc.). The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to ensure that these instruments are developed within a coherent narrative for individuals, organisations and stakeholders, with special attention to possible barriers, how we can remove them and how we can raise awareness and mobilise individuals, organisations and stakeholders (see [flagship 2](#)). Moreover, guidance is also needed (see [flagship 5](#)) to teach individuals and organisations how to think in terms of competencies.

- 🚩 (DWSE) The Government of Flanders is developing a system for **macro competence forecasts** based on job vacancy analysis, employer surveys and expert panels so that we can better monitor (expected) trends on the demand side of the labour market (linked to broad social transitions such as digitalisation and climate) and have a central compass for the career and competency policy.
- 🚩 (DWSE) The Government of Flanders is preparing **competency checks for employees** on their own initiative (as part of All hands on deck).
- 🚩 (VDAB) In the context of career management, VDAB is committed to the development of a more **personalised career platform** with a logically clustered competency overview (My Career).
- 🚩 (E&T) E&T is further concentrating on the **development of the Learning and Experience Certificates Database (LED)** by making the content of the completed training visible in addition to the recognised certificates of qualification, and by establishing a link to the content of the professional qualifications and partial



qualifications obtained. Additional extensions to the LED (e.g. certificates for competencies) are being explored.

- (VDAB+E&T) The Government of Flanders is **actively working on the interoperability of different competency languages**, which enables broad applications in organisational and training contexts. Ahovoks, VDAB and other stakeholders are actively working together on this.
- (E&T+DWSE+VDAB) The Government of Flanders is further rolling out the **integrated RAC policy** in qualitative and quantitative terms. Quantitatively by pursuing an increase in the number of RAC routes and RAC test centres. Qualitatively by paying attention to the quality of the RAC instruments, the offering and the guidance of candidates.
- (LLP) The Partnership **monitors the results of the policy actions**, examines the **barriers, gaps and levers** with the intention of complementing the Flemish strategic competency programme where possible and translating them into the various instruments and actions. If necessary, we formulate recommendations addressed to the stakeholders and the authorities responsible for implementation.



Flagship 5 Guidance and support for lifelong learning: accompanying policies

Ambition(s): Learner-centred, Technology, Inclusive learning, On-the-job learning and working while learning, Collaboration

The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to make citizens, organisations and intermediaries as self-reliant as possible with regard to strengthening and working with competencies. The information and best practices resulting from the aforementioned flagships are used and applied to the maximum in this respect. In doing so, we take into account possible barriers, avoid the Matthew effect and pay special attention to inclusive learning.

To this end, the Partnership is looking at a more coherent framework for guidance and support that is delivered as a whole to all stakeholders⁵, on a continuum from less to more self-reliance. The continuum is divided into 3 waves and each wave focuses on both individuals and organisations.






⁵ Including trade unions, employer and sector organisations.


	Focus on the individual	Focus on the organisation
Wave 1 Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (VDAB) More personalised career platform for each citizen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (ESF) Accessible online platform
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (LLP) Analysis of digital support tools and instruments 	
Wave 2 Informal/ Organic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (LLP) Explore the role of mediators for lifelong learning 🚩 (LLP) Investigate low-barrier conversation methodology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (ESF) Support offering for learning jobs in learning organisations 🚩 (ESF) ESF assignment learning eagerness with guidance pathways for companies and their employees 🚩 (ESF) Coaching tool for learning organisations 🚩 (ESF) Competency check plan for SMEs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (LLP) Second-line support analysis 	
Wave 3 External/ structured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (E&T+DWSE+VDAB) Regional cooperation of learning shops with local partners 🚩 (VDAB) Career guidance (via career cheques) 🚩 (DWSE) Initiatives for supporting second half of a person's career 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚩 (LLP) Third-line support analysis 	







In the **first wave**, we focus on digital tools and gateways: platforms and online applications for citizens, individuals and training and education providers where information can be accessed with pointers to the services provided. The Partnership calls attention to the bundling of existing and new instruments, tools, tips and tricks to take your learning career into your own hands or to organise it. This service is universal and intended to get people started (independently). Sufficient attention must also be paid to citizens with insufficient digital literacy.

In the short term, we are counting on VDAB and ESF, among others, for governmental development of digital information portals and platforms aimed at learning citizens (VDAB) and learning organisations (ESF).

-  (VDAB) VDAB is planning the development of a more **personalised career platform for every citizen** (My Career) and a digital training platform that gathers the offerings of VDAB and partners for, in the first place, jobseekers and vulnerable employees. In My Career, citizens can view their career and manage their career data with tools and digital support for jobs, training and orientation on the labour market.
-  (ESF) As part of the ESF assignment Learning Eagerness, an **accessible online platform** with supporting materials is being created that organisations (HR managers, consultants, company managers, team leaders, training providers, etc.) can use to orientate themselves and gain more in-depth knowledge on how to increase the learning eagerness of their employees and organisations' learning efficiency.
-  (LLP) The Partnership **examines whether the existing digital support tools and -instruments sufficiently meet the needs**, whether there are gaps and/or opportunities, and whether synergies are possible, taking into account inspiring examples from home and abroad. If necessary, the members formulate recommendations addressed to the stakeholders and the authorities responsible for implementation.

In a **second wave**, we consider support close to the individuals and organisations we want to reach. In doing so, we try to identify signals, remedy barriers and guide people towards and along the learning path they have in mind. The support is informal and easy to understand, and is intended to organically strengthen individuals, often through organisations, in their learning process. An important focus here is clearly on support for companies and their employees, where efforts should be made to create an open learning and feedback culture, to possibly redesign jobs and to increase (new) learning opportunities in jobs, which is encouraged by the HR policy, the work organisation and the company strategy. The focus here should also be on organisations or businesses that do not yet have the capacity to be learning institutions. Why are they not able to succeed? Why can other organisations succeed?

-  (ESF) We are creating a broad ESF-financed **support offering** to position **learning jobs in learning organisations** (DRIVE, learning eagerness, employment organisation 2.0., assessment of the work organisation and the jobs, etc.).

-  (ESF) This includes the development of an **ESF assignment on learning eagerness** with concrete guidance pathways for companies to redesign and implement employee learning pathways and to evaluate the effects on learning transfer and motivation⁶.
-  (ESF) We are developing a **coaching tool to support the transformation to a learning organisation**, including a reference to the offering that exists in this area and provided by the Department WSE/ESF.
-  (ESF) Within the framework of the **competency checks for small and medium-sized enterprises** (All hands on deck), organisations receive help for the competences check-up in their organisation and to draw up a **plan of action** at both the individual employee and enterprise level (via intermediary (inter-)sectoral organisations).
-  (LLP) We are investigating how to shape the role of **mediators for lifelong learning**. These mediators are active in various learning contexts (workplaces, mediation, education, etc.) and come into contact with various target groups; they raise awareness among potential learners and prepare them for training. Here we make optimum use of the knowledge and expertise that already exists or will be developed.
-  (LLP) We investigate to what extent we can develop an **easy to understand conversation method** to capture learning questions, identify barriers as well as provide orientation and support so that it can be widely used by organisations (HR services, company managers, fellow employees, career counsellors, social workers, etc.). For this we can call on the knowledge of academics and professionals (such as learning shops).
-  (LLP) The Partnership **examines whether the existing second-line support sufficiently meets the needs**, whether there are gaps and/or opportunities, and whether synergies are possible, taking into account inspiring examples from home and abroad. Specifically, we must investigate whether and how an orientation instrument can complement the existing set of tools that allows organisations, among other things, to analyse the jobs they offer, the learning opportunities they provide and how these can be increased. If necessary, we formulate recommendations addressed to the stakeholders and the authorities responsible for implementation.

⁶ A start can then be made from these adjustments to the already existing training efforts, if relevant to the company, to anchor these new practices by means of an overarching adapted training and education policy.

In a **third wave**, we work towards an objective, neutral, more structured and often external support of the learner and/or his/her organisation. In this wave, we are thinking of more intensive forms of service, preferably across structures, which we want to develop around the learner and his/her organisation (rather than the other way around). The learner and his/her needs must be the focus; the structures are secondary.

Based on this logic, the Partnership would like to see the existing forms of (learning) career guidance converge, based on a continuous assessment of the needs and barriers and how the existing offering already meets these needs.

- 🚩 (E&T+DWSE+VDAB) Take a more outreaching approach to the **guidance of learning questions** through strong cross-network **regional cooperation of learning shops with local partners** in the world of education and work.
- 🚩 (VDAB) Develop a more career and competency-oriented approach within the system of **career guidance (with career vouchers)**, for example with knowledge-sharing sessions and the targeted dissemination of knowledge about competencies (including the dashboard and prognoses).
- 🚩 (DWSE) The Government of Flanders is investigating whether specific initiatives aimed at career and competency enhancement in the **second half of a person's career** are possible.
- 🚩 (LLP) The Partnership **examines whether the existing third-line support sufficiently meets the needs**, whether there are gaps and/or opportunities, and whether synergies are possible, taking into account inspiring examples from home and abroad. Particular attention must be paid to outreach through external agencies. If necessary, we formulate recommendations addressed to the stakeholders and the authorities responsible for implementation.



Flagship 6 Guidance and support for the providers of our offering

Ambition(s): Quality, Transparency, Cooperation, Technology, Inclusive learning

The offering requires a separate approach in terms of support and guidance. The Partnership's ambition is to create a learning offering, to support providers in shaping a contemporary, high-quality, where possible blended, flexible, sometimes dual and innovative offering of learning pathways.

The entire education and training landscape is in flux. Cooperation between public training providers, private and public training providers and innovation stakeholders (see below) will be crucial to meet this challenge. The Partnership is committed to contributing to these



partnerships and eliminating barriers to the provision of contemporary services. But above all, it also wants to help providers to co-create their offerings through customised support, training and coaching and the provision of data, tools and insights.

- ❏ (E&T) The **authorities are developing a training compass** that will provide trainees with an insight into the available training and education offerings. This is in response to the current fragmentation.
- ❏ (E&T) Offer **coaching training for teachers, lecturers and instructors**, including ICT training (as part of Digisprong, Edusprong and Voorsprongfonds).

- (DWSE+VDAB+E&T) Support private and public **training providers in the transition to e-learning**. This is to strengthen the digital competencies of trainers, to stimulate digital learning tools (e.g. KlasCement), and to adapt methodologies and training packages to the hybrid training reality. An example of this is the e-learning action plan with, for example, the call for e-learning, the creation of a central information point and a learning network.
- (DWSE+E&T) Deal with the digital divide: **extra support for learners with a digital disadvantage (in the private and public training landscape)**, e.g. digibanks, an e-learning action plan, attention for blended learning for NT2 and low-literacy learners.
- (VLAIO) Inspire training providers to innovate on the basis of developments in the innovation landscape through various **innovation projects in the VLAIO network** (e.g. Edtech, Tetra, I-learn, blikopener, etc.).
- (LLP) The Partnership looks at how the provided instruments can maximise the benefits for lifelong learning by making **targeted recommendations** for the stakeholders and authorities in charge of implementation. The Partnership strives for maximum accessibility of the current initiatives and low-barrier disclosure to citizens and organisations (such as private providers).



Flagship 7 Strengthen partnerships for lifelong learning in a future-oriented way







Ambition(s): Collaboration

We will only be able to navigate all the formulated streams if we succeed in creating powerful partnerships across the various (educational) levels, institutions and stakeholders in lifelong



learning. An ecosystem where cooperation is the norm and impact the result. The Lifelong Learning Partnership wants to help build this kind of partnership by seeking and supporting innovative ecosystems and networks and by regularly bringing stakeholders together for the purpose of co-creation and to draw lessons from existing projects. Potential barriers are also identified and removed in order to strengthen partnerships.

- ❏ (DWSE+SERV) Through the sector covenants and the **action plan of the inter-sectoral advisors**, we strengthen the exchange of experience and thematic cooperation on lifelong learning across industry sectors.
- ❏ (ESF) By 2024, the Government of Flanders will be giving shape through the ESF to 3 to 4 **local learning ecosystems** in pilot phase as a lever for creating and supporting a learning culture from an early age and throughout life. This is done by allowing learning to take place at the local level, across all aspects of daily life and the daily reality of citizens. Local stakeholders (local government, sports clubs, welfare services, cultural organisations, youth movements, schools, companies, etc.) together create learning opportunities for and with citizens. Broad aspects of guidance, support, matching supply and demand, etc. can be addressed within these partnerships.

-  (VLAIO) We focus on **co-creation in the training and education offering** through bold partnerships of training providers and innovation stakeholders, businesses and/or higher education institutions.
-  (DWSE) The Government of Flanders shall **enter into dialogue with the federal government** to take action, where necessary through asymmetrical policies, so that the federal policy levers are used in such a way as to strengthen the Flemish policy levers and -intentions on lifelong learning.
-  (LLP) **Stimulate partnerships** and help make them sustainable by providing information, organising events, bringing stakeholders together.
-  (LLP) We want to facilitate the **evolution from training to career funds** and are investigating which initiatives are needed to realise more synergy between government initiatives and career-enhancing (inter-)sectoral initiatives, as a lever for lifelong learning in Flanders.
-  (LLP) We **connect existing agendas**, such as the STEM agenda and the Strategic Literacy Plan, which are responsible for (sub)aspects of lifelong learning, and seek cross-fertilisation and alignment for maximum impact on lifelong learning.
-  (LLP) We **coordinate** with the education umbrella organisations and GO! about the key competencies for learning and careers **in initial education depending on the LLL competencies**. After all, the basis for lifelong learning in adult life is laid here.

⁷ The Partnership is aware of the fact that competencies related to learning and careers are included in the sixteen key competencies of the attainment targets. For learning competencies, more focus is on the regulation of learning opinions, processes and results, research competencies, problem-solving and critical thinking, information processing and collaboration. On the other hand, career competencies are part of the key competence 'Developing initiative, ambition, entrepreneurship and career skills'.

APPENDIX 1 COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Lifelong learning is facing a number of challenges in Flanders. The following is a selection of figures and results of studies on lifelong learning in Flanders.

TRAINING PARTICIPATION

Training participation of Flemish adults

Six main sources exist for data on lifelong learning, and more specifically training participation, namely Labour Force Survey (LFS), Adult Education Survey (AES), Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), European Skills and Jobs Survey (ESJS), European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) (Van Langenhove et al., 2020). However, they do not all have the same target groups, are conducted at different times with different methodologies and use different definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning or do not even make the distinction⁸. They are therefore considered together in what follows.

In the AES (2016) we observe **significant differences in participation by type of learning**. In Flanders, but also in other European countries, adults between 25 and 64 generally participate much more in informal learning (63.4%) and non-formal learning (44.4%) than in formal learning (6.8%). Flanders also seems to **score rather poorly** compared to the other European countries. For participation in formal learning, the score for Flanders is even lower than the European average (OECD, 2019, based on PIAAC 2012/2015, Figure 2). The OECD subsequently concluded in its Skills Strategy (2019) that Flanders lacks a learning culture.

⁸ See Table 2 (p. 20) Overview of training forms per source in Van Langenhove et al. 2020 for the different definitions.

Figure 2.1. Adult learning levels in Flanders in comparison with other countries

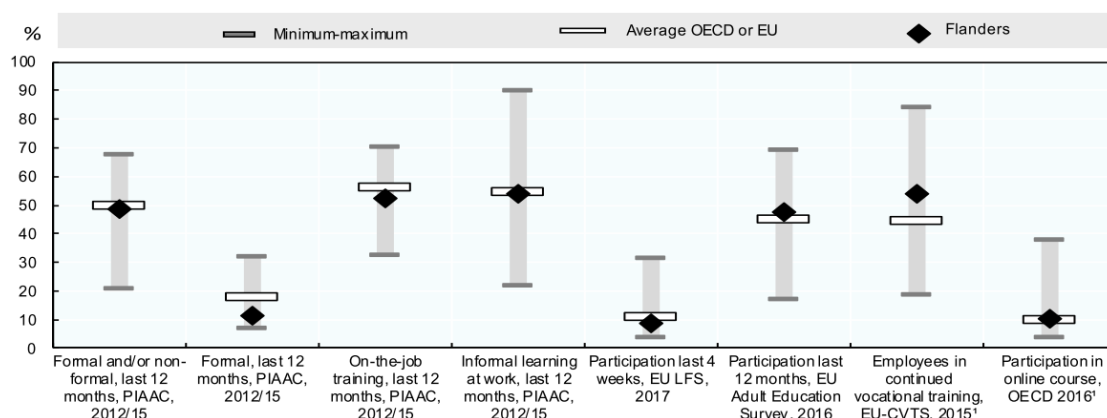


Figure 2 Training participation in Flanders compared to the European average (OECD 2019)

The conclusion made by the AES about participation in formal and non-formal learning is confirmed in other sources (Figure 3). In 2019, respectively 9% (per four weeks) and 23% (per year) of the Flemish population aged between 25 and 64 still took part in formal or non-formal learning for work or private purposes according to the LFS.⁹

Also on the basis of the four-week indicator of the LFS (2020), it appears that Flanders is far behind some of its neighbours, such as the Netherlands (19%) and Luxembourg (16%), and is a good **European mid-tier player** (European average: 9%). The latter is also confirmed on the basis of the 12-month indicator in the AES (Flanders 48% and Europe 45%), PIAAC (Flanders 49% and Europe 51%) and the ESJS (Belgium 69% and Europe 67%), although Flanders does slightly better in the AES and ESJS. The CVTS and the EWCS provide a more positive picture for Belgium: participation according to the CVTS in Belgium is 52% and higher than the European average of 41%, and this is also the case according to the EWCS with 49% and 41% respectively.

In the **corona year 2020**, the percentages were also **slightly lower**: 8% (per four weeks) and 21% (per year) respectively. The same was observed in other European member states: the European average for the four-week indicator dropped from 11% to 9%. The OECD (2021) even reports a decline of 18% on average for non-formal learning and of 25% on average for informal learning.

⁹ In the LFS Statbel, training participation is surveyed in two reference periods instead of only per year as in the other surveys, namely per four weeks and per year. The twelve-month indicator tells us something about the degree of participation, i.e. the access to training. The four-week indicator gives an indication of training participation at a specific point in time, i.e. the intensity of participation (Goglio & Meroni, 2014).

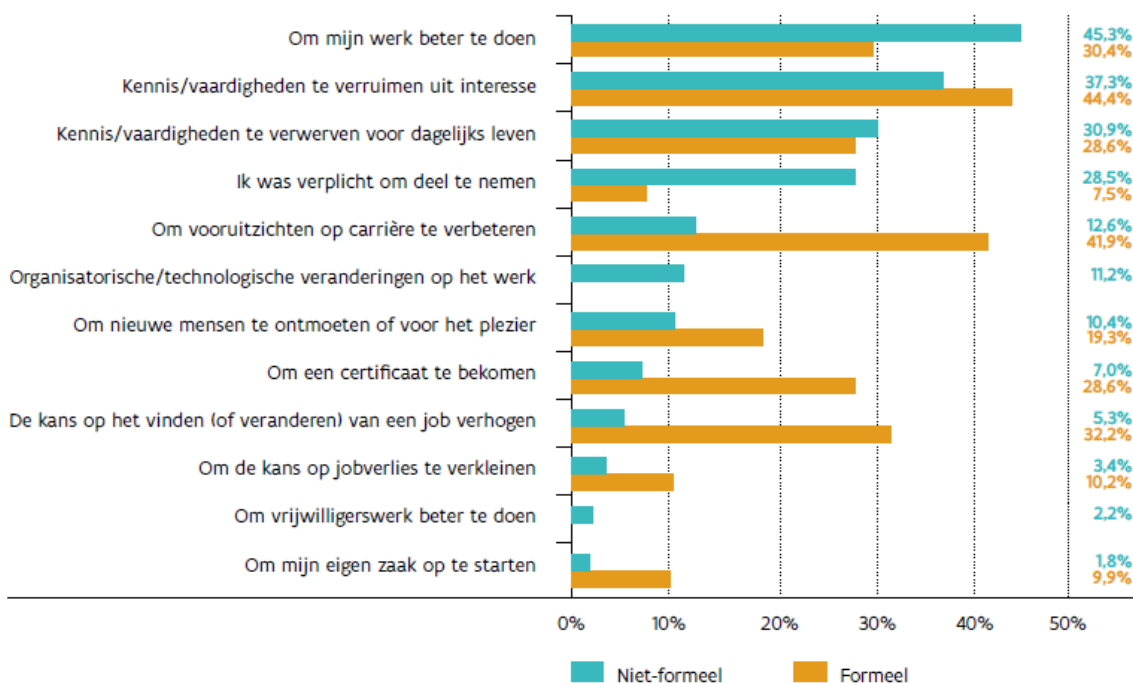


Figure 3 Training participation in Flanders

The AES (2016) additionally surveyed **why adults participated** in LLL, showing that most formal and non-formal training was undertaken for the sake of work (Figure 4). These reasons are more or less confirmed in the COVID-19 survey by Statistics Flanders (2021)¹⁰: 23.5% of adults said they had taken a course, education or training for work, compared to 9% as a leisure activity. This survey confirmed another trend: 67% of those surveyed said they had not participated in lifelong learning during the corona crisis. Reasons also differ **for each type of learning** (Van Langenhove et al., 2020). The AES shows that almost half of the non-formal learning and one third of the formal learning was undertaken to improve skills for the current job, while formal learning is strongly pursued for career advancement purposes. Improving career prospects (41.9%), increasing the chances of finding (or changing) a job (32.2%), and obtaining a certificate (28.6%) are strong motivators for formal learning but less so for non-formal learning (12.6%, 5.3% and 7.0% respectively).

¹⁰ These figures have been adjusted for the over-25s. In the published report, the figures are from age 18 onwards.

Figuur 17: Aandeel opleidingsactiviteiten waarvoor een specifieke motivatie voor deelname werd opgegeven (Vlaanderen, 2016; referentieperiode: 12 maanden)



Noot: Respondenten konden meerdere antwoorden aanduiden bij deze vraag.

Bron: AES 2016, Statbel (Algemene Directie Statistiek – Statistics Belgium) en Eurostat (Bewerking Departement WSE)

Figure 4 Reasons for participation in Flanders (Van Langenhove et al. 2020)

On the other hand, formal training courses are also more often followed out of personal interest (44.4%) or to meet new people or for fun (19.3%).

As far as higher education is concerned, Van Langenhove et al. (2020, based on AES 2016) found that only 3.4% of 25-64-year-olds were in higher education (HBO5, graduates, bachelors, masters). The OECD (2019, based on PIAAC 2012, 2015) reports that only 1% of students who obtain a degree (ISCED 5a, bachelor, master, doctorate) after the average age are adults. That is significantly less than in Denmark (10%).

Unequal participation in Flanders

The overall training participation rates hide significant inequalities. Irrespective of the reference period taken into account, the over-55-year-olds, the low-qualified and the non-working population for example are less likely to participate in training. In other words, participation in lifelong learning is unequal in Flanders: training only reaches the vulnerable groups to a limited extent. Strong groups benefit more from lifelong learning. The **Matthew effect** is therefore a focus point for several researchers (OECD, 2019, 2021; Van Langenhove et al. 2020; Martin, 2018).

Reviewing the figures, we see first of all differences in participation according to **age**: the older individuals get, the less they participate. Within the working population, participation is highest among 25–34-year-olds and lowest among the over-55 age group. The decrease in participation is most prominent for non-formal learning: from 55.5% to 29%. The over-55 age group still seems to learn informally relatively often (58%), but participation in formal learning is very low (3.3%) (Figure 5, based on AES 2016)¹¹. The COVID-19 survey of Statistics Flanders (2021) confirms that the decrease is the strongest for job-related training.

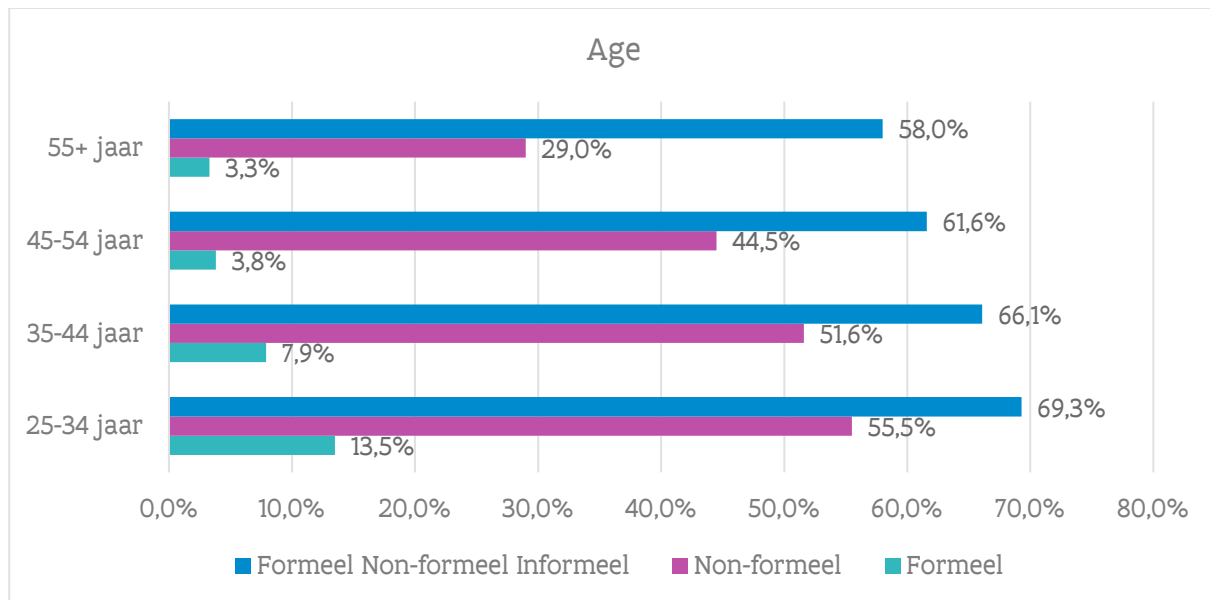


Figure 5 Participation by age and by type of learning (AES 2016)

As far as the **education level** is concerned, we see a decrease in participation (Figure 7). Low-qualified people participate less in all forms of learning, but the difference is the most prominent for non-formal learning. Van Langenhove et al. (2020) note that high-qualified Flemish people participate in training more than three times more than low-qualified people (34.6% and 9.8% respectively) in 2019. According to the OECD (2021), the gap in Flanders is 47%, which is above the European average of 42%. The corona crisis has even widened the gap. Between 2019 and 2020, participation among the high-qualified went up (from 41% to 42.7%) but dropped among the low-qualified (from 18.4% to 17.7%).

However, lifelong learning is of great importance to **vulnerable groups**: 15% of adults in Flanders are functionally illiterate. In other words, they have difficulty writing e-mails, looking up information, or reading and understanding written texts (Cincinnati & De Meyer, 2013). During the 2018-2019 school year, 32% of unique enrolments (or just over 122,000 course participants) in adult education were for an NT2 course, of which about one third were

¹¹ A similar observation was made in the COVID-19 survey of Statistics Flanders.



migrants. In addition, a recent study into low literacy among adults in asylum seekers care (Hooft et al., 2020) shows that 10% of adult newcomers cannot read or write and that 42% do not have sufficient skills to understand, process and use written texts at the primary school level. A considerable part of this target group will eventually move on to an NT2 class.

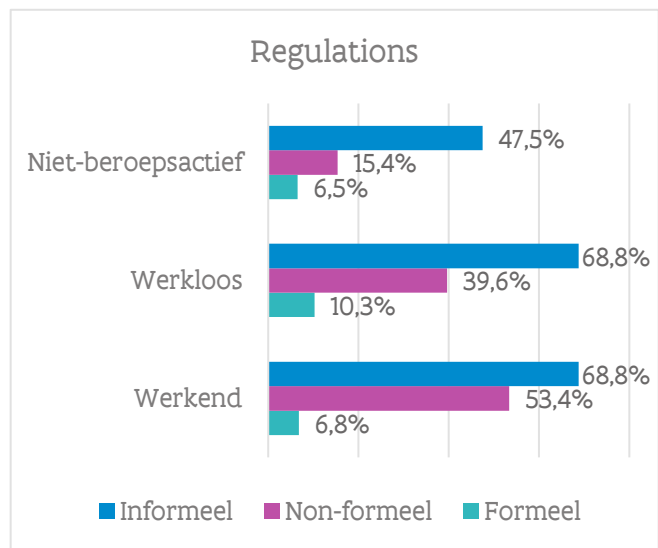
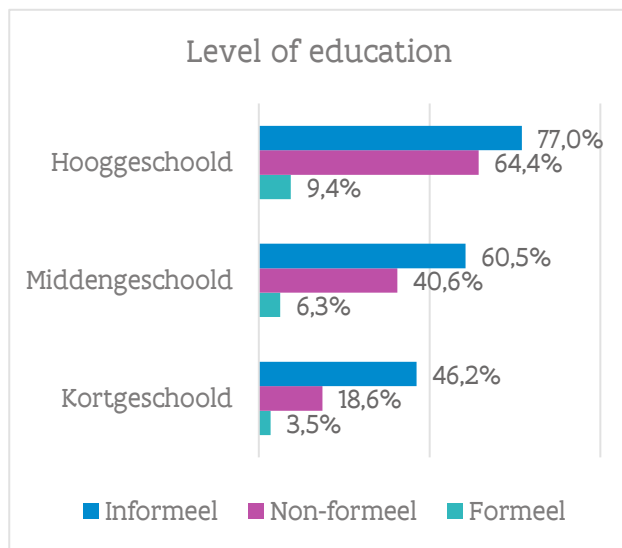


Figure 6 Participation by level of education and by type of learning (AES 2016)

Figure 7 Participation by status and by type of learning (AES 2016)

In terms of employment status, the employed and unemployed participate in training more often than the non-working population (Figure 6). Within the working population group, it is also clear that the intensity of training (see four-week indicator in the LFS) is relatively higher among the unemployed (13.4%) than among those in employment (7.8%), which is partly explained by the fact that training is often part of the pathway to employment and sometimes even compulsory. Self-employed people also participate in training courses slightly more often (9%) than the corresponding group of employed people to which they belong. Based on the 12-month indicator of the AES (2016), salaried employees generally have a higher participation rate. More prominent differences also exist here between the groups in terms of participation in non-formal training: only 15.4% of non-working people participate in non-formal training, compared with 39.6% of the unemployed and 53.4% of the employed.

According to Van Langenhove et al. (2020), participation may also vary depending on the size of the business and the industry sector of employment. Salaried employees in sectors that do well for training participation can often count on (co-)financing by their employer. Furthermore, the report also indicates that non-formal training is relatively often followed during working hours (24.1% of adults and 31.8% of employees) and that such training is more often partly or fully paid for by the employer. Formal training is more often paid for by the learner. According to the OECD (2019), participation in job-related (non-)formal training is lower for smaller businesses. This phenomenon does not apply to training that is not job-related and



is similar in the different European countries. In addition, the OECD (2019) observes a difference in participation based on the employment contract. For contracts with an indefinite term, about 50% of adults follow job-related training, while for fixed-term contracts this is 42% and for temporary agency workers only 23%.

Barriers

The inequality in participation also results in **barriers** that individuals experience in order to participate in training (Van Langenhove et al., 2020, based on AES 2016). For 20.1% of 25–64-year-olds, lack of time appears to be the main barrier for people wanting to participate but not doing so. This is a significant barrier for the high-qualified (30.3%) and 25–34-year-olds (29.7%) but much less so for the low-qualified, the non-working population and the over-55s. However, low-qualified (8.4%), unemployed (13.9%), the non-working population (11.5%) and over-55s (7.9%) experience dispositional barriers more often than average. For example, a lack of support from the employer or VDAB (10.7%) and institutional barriers (22.6%) are experienced more often than average by the unemployed.

Financial barriers play a more important role among the unemployed (11%) and among younger people (age 25-34) (9.5%), but in general these barriers are less important in Flanders, and certainly in the European context, as is shown by PIAAC. Flanders does in fact have various financial incentives for individuals and employers to reduce direct and indirect costs. Unfortunately, a Matthew effect is also visible for these incentives. Low-qualified and older adults make less use of career vouchers and the training credit (OECD 2021). The PIAAC survey indicates that especially family responsibilities and the time and location of the training are above average barriers for Flanders.

Another important obstacle to training participation, which is not usually included as one of the barriers, is access to information. Although 39% of the total population received free information on training (mostly from the training providers themselves), vulnerable target groups received information on training less often than other social categories (Figure 8): low-qualified (19%), the non-working population (20.7%) and over-55s (25.4%). This indicates that these groups have been reached only to a limited extent so far.



Training willingness

The OECD (2019) developed a proxy for **learning culture**. Compared to other OECD countries and regions, Flanders ranks at the bottom, far below average. As already stated, Flanders does not have a learning culture. The AES (2016) also shows that in Flanders a relatively large group does not want to learn: 41.9% did not participate and do not want to participate. This score is in line with the EU-28 average (42.8%) but is significantly higher than, for example, the Netherlands (27%) (OECD, 2021).

The AES (2016) also reveals differences by level of education, age and employment status. For example, only 33% of the low-qualified have completed training or are motivated to do so (compared to 77.8% of the high-qualified). Over-55s and the non-working population are also less willing (Figure 8). Cedefop (2016) points to a difference between the high-qualified, who are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to pursue training, and the low-qualified, who are more likely to participate because they are obliged to. This difference is also observed in an analysis by Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2015). Cedefop also observes that the real barriers for low-qualified people are more related to self-image and identity, which are harder to measure, while situational barriers are of secondary importance (Cedefop, 2016).

In Flanders, the main "barrier" to participation for these (vulnerable) categories appears to be that they do not realize how important training can be. 58% of those who are not in training and also do not wish to participate say they **do not need** training. About a quarter of the respondents do not participate in a training programme because they feel they do not need one, a percentage that rises to almost 40% for the low-qualified, the over-55s and the non-working population (Figure 8). In a survey of teachers, only 25% indicated a need to learn for their job (OECD, 2019 based on PIAAC).

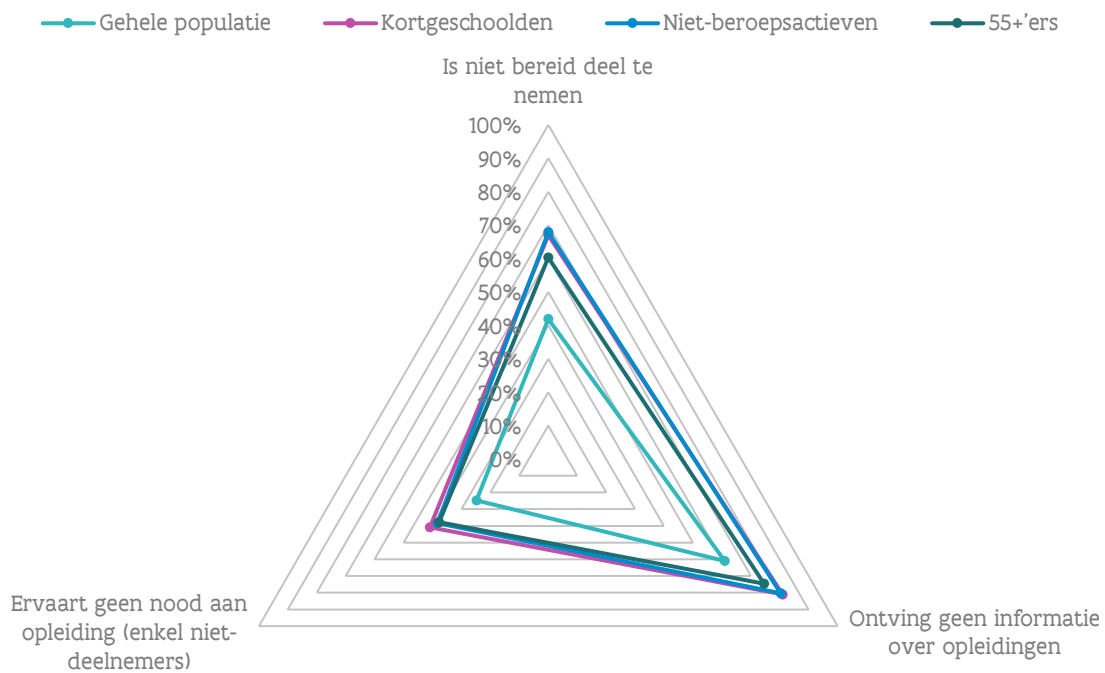


Figure 6 Groups with low training participation

TRANSITIONS AND THE NEED FOR COMPETENCIES

A society in transition

The Flemish labour market and society in general face major challenges in the coming decades. The occupations monitor of the Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring (Steunpunt Werk), shows that the relative share in the labour market of knowledge professions (intellectual, scientific and artistic professions) has increased the most in the last decade, together with the share of managers. Almost all other occupational groups remained the same or decreased. In other words, there is a growing demand for high-qualified personnel.

Due to the ageing of the population, people with low qualifications especially are leaving the labour market at a rapid pace (De Smet et al., 2021), which will make it even more difficult to fill vacancies for certain shortage occupations (e.g. jobs in the construction industry) (De Vos et al., 2021). This is also true for nurses and primary education teachers.

Robotisation and the digital, technological and green revolution will also make certain professions less relevant (Oppenheimer, 2019). According to the OECD Skills Strategy, 14% of current jobs in Flanders have a high chance of being automated, while another 29% of jobs



are facing significant changes due to automation. And 1 in 10 jobs would be completely new by 2030 (Agoria, 2018).

At the same time, these large-scale transformations are not yet complete, which makes it difficult to predict which professions will be most needed in ten years' time and which sectors will undergo the greatest changes. This highlights the importance both for society and for the individuals involved of training and retraining and of being able to respond more flexibly to these changes will only increase, among other things, by developing "transversal skills", i.e. skills that can be used and applied in different contexts (OECD, 2021). But at the same time, according to De Vos et al. (2021), knowledge about skills forecasting are lacking and, as a result, the (future) demand is insufficiently known to individuals, organisations and society.

Demand for competencies.

Which competencies and profiles exactly are required on the demand side of the labour market to keep up with these changes?

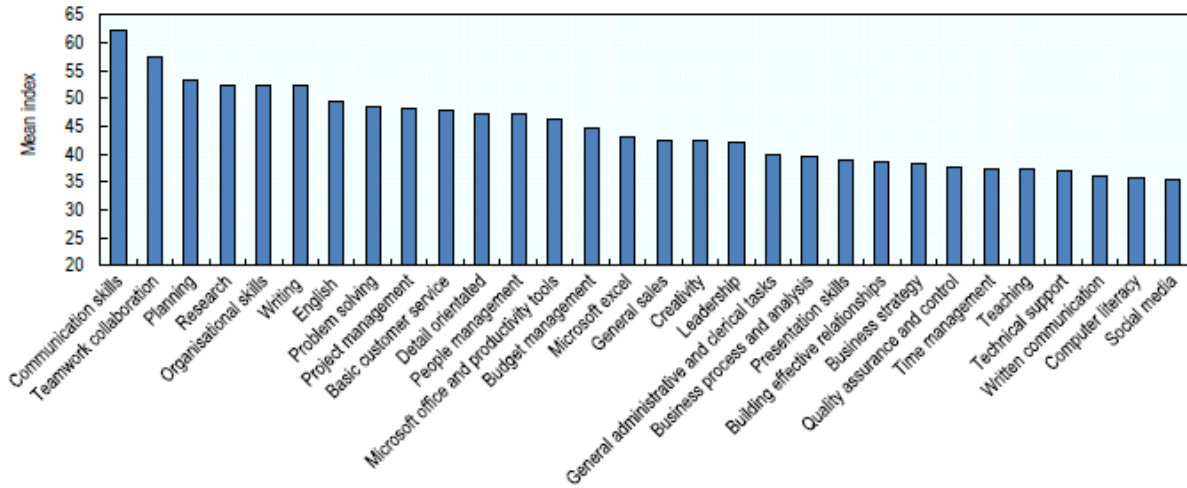
- In the monitoring report (Van Langenhove et al., 2020), the **specific competencies of employees** are discussed on the basis of the CVTS. Technical, practical and job-specific skills receive the most attention in Belgium, both in terms of the skills that companies promote most through training (79.1%) and those that are considered important for the development of the company (60.7%). Other important skills were customer focus (45.6%), team working (38.7%), problem solving (29.1%), IT skills (27.3%) and management skills (16.2%)¹².
- According to the OECD (2019), the biggest shortages are in **healthcare, education and STEM**.
- Roland Berger (2021) also sees a growing demand for technical professions and competencies (**STEM**). An increasing shortage of STEM graduates is predicted by 2035 for demand, and at the same time, of insufficient sector-specific training and educational experts for the profiles and competencies required for the green transition. In this respect, the finding of De Coen et al. (2018) that more than 1 in 4 STEM graduates hold a job that is not in line with his/her field of study must also be considered.
- There is a high demand on the labour market for **transversal skills**, such as communication, cooperation, planning, problem-solving, organisational skills, leadership etc. (OECD 2021, Roland Berger). At the same time, international and Flemish research shows the importance of broad transversal skills in order to remain sustainably employable later in life or to participate fully in society (Hanushek et al., 2017; Hampf and Woessmann, 2017; Laurijssen and Glorieux, 2017 – see Edusprong 2021). According to the OECD (2021), the corona crisis

¹² The CVTS survey is interesting because it provides an answer to the question of what competencies companies consider to be important. It should be noted, however, that CVTS is voluntary and companies that are more involved in training are more likely to participate.

has highlighted the importance of these transversal competences, and profiles must have the right mix of transversal skills.

Figure 5.8. Top 30 transversal skill keywords, by degree of transversality

United Kingdom 2017-2019



Note: The chart presents the 30 most transversal skills, knowledge areas and technologies emerging from the ML analysis of the text contained in online job postings in the United Kingdom in between 2017 and 2019. Larger bars denote stronger transversality calculated as the eigenvector centrality of each keyword in the corpus of labels collected in online vacancies.

Source: OECD calculations based on Burning Glass Technologies data, May 2021.


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Figure 7 Transversal skills in demand on the UK labour market – OECD 2021

→ **Digital skills** are one of the most in-demand skills today (OECD, 2021), and in the future Roland Berger (2021) predicts a need for 49,000 workers per year with basic digital skills. Unfortunately, 38% of the Flemish population had low to no digital skills in 2019, again mainly among the elderly, the low-qualified and people on lower incomes (Figure 10).



Overzicht digitale vaardigheden¹⁾ van Vlaamse bevolking²⁾ [%; 2019]

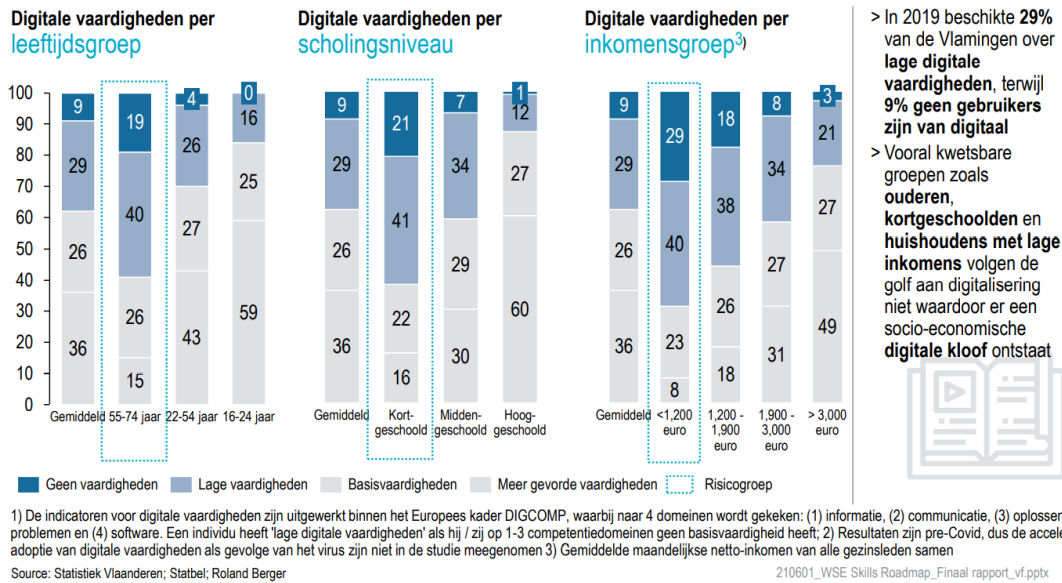


Figure 8 Digital skills – Roland Berger 2021

→ The OECD's Skills Strategy (2019) shows that Flemish people generally have higher competencies than the OECD average (top 20%), but that they do not use numeracy skills enough in the workplace. In addition, there does seem to be a **strong link between the motivation to learn and competency levels** (OECD, 2021). More specifically, positive links exist with levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments. Moreover, technology-rich environments and digitalisation seem to have a stimulating effect on lifelong learning (Van Damme, 2021). Low literacy is also often linked to the lack of other key competencies and school skills related to self-regulation, such as problem-solving ability, adaptability, sense of responsibility and social skills (Schiepers & Van Nuffel, 2017).

METHODS FOR LLL

According to De Vos et al. (2021; Baert et al., 2020; Van Langenhove et al., 2020), the training offering is fragmented and people find it difficult to navigate; in addition, information about incentives is also fragmented (SERV, 2021).

Through the employer who organises training

A high share of training companies (companies that provide training for to their employees) can be found in the Flemish Region (85.2%), comparable to the Netherlands (85%) and higher than France (78.9%) (Van Langenhove et al., 2021, based on CVTS 2015). The CVTS results are

quite high compared to the results from the social balance sheets¹³. According to the social balance sheets in 2019, only 15.2% of companies were classified as training companies (Sourbron et al., 2021). Flanders is also at the top of the EU-28 in terms of training funding, with 2.2% of the total wage bill invested in internal and external training. As already indicated, only half of the employees participate in the offered training. In addition, significant differences exist in training efforts between organisations that fail to understand the need for training and those that do not have the necessary knowledge or access. (De Vos et al., 2021; Desmet & De Vos, 2020b; Sourbron & Vansteenkiste, 2021). In any case, participation is much higher for large companies than for small ones, and for training companies than for non-training companies. According to De Vos et al. (2021), however, employers' training efforts have not made much progress and still focus too much on current jobs and too little on transversal skills.

Through training leading to a (vocational) qualification

While in-service training, vocational training and retraining in later life is important for participating in the labour market and society, a person's initial education forms the basis for further development and opportunities throughout life (Kautz et al., 2014; OECD, 2019, 2021). According to the school-leavers report of the VDAB, almost **10%** of the more than 65,000 school-leavers in 2019 **did not obtain any qualification**. In addition, 7.3% of young people aged 15-24 in Flanders are not in employment, education or training (young people NEET), according to figures for 2020 of the Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring (Steunpunt Werk). This percentage is much higher than in the Netherlands (4.5%) for example. An analysis based on data from the VISKA project shows that socio-economically and socio-culturally weaker pupils, young people in vocational secondary education and young people with a problematic school career more often leave school without a secondary education diploma. They are also less likely to find their way to second-chance learning paths or the central examination board when compared to promising young people without a diploma (Derks, Smits and Vos, 2021). Young people without a school certificate or a secondary education diploma remain vulnerable on the labour market and often lack sustainable employment.

Vocational qualifications have been developed by the sectors and AHOVOKS over the past 10 years with a view to expanding the formal training offering on top of secondary and higher education diplomas and adult education; these qualifications have become the basis for education, training and RPL pathways and consequently also a reference framework for lifelong learning. This concerns 267 training programmes in secondary education, 92 in special secondary education BuSO OV3, 262 standard tracks for dual learning, 23 graduate programmes, 89 training profiles in adult education, 7 RPL routes (and 10 new RPL standards that will soon lead to RPL routes), 10 RPL standard routes and 10 training profiles approved by WSE.

¹³ The CVTS is a voluntary survey and companies interested in training may be overrepresented (self-selection).

According to the Flemish Employability Monitor (SERV, 2019), learning opportunities¹⁴ in the workplace for employees and the self-employed did not shift substantially between 2016 and 2019. The most significant Improvements occurred between 2014 and 2016. In 2019, 83.4% of employees are in the non-problematic/acceptable category, 16.6% in the problematic category and 5.5% in the acutely problematic category in terms of learning opportunities at work. While the figures for the self-employed are 96.5%, 3.5% and 0.5% respectively.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PROPER GUIDANCE

Studies show that effective guidance can lead to increased participation (European Commission, 2015; ELGPN, 2014). It is very important that individuals have a positive attitude towards learning, that they are made aware of the benefits of learning and of specific competencies, and that information is provided in an accessible and transparent way (searching for information but not finding it has a significant negative impact on participation).

In addition, good guidance specifically aimed at target groups that participate less in lifelong learning seems to be more effective than targeted financial incentives (European Commission, 2015; Tyers et al., 2004; Taylor, 2002). Identifying learning and career opportunities, with a clear link between working and learning, as well as access to customised offerings and guidance, is essential. Outreach through intermediary organisations, RAC, and specific programmes for the target groups with integration of basic competencies seem to have a positive effect on the participation of different target groups. The ERASMUS+ project GOAL (Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners) included experiments between 2015 and 2017 to guide low-qualified adults to suitable training offerings through an independent and easily accessible service. The evaluation of the project emphasized the importance of tailor-made, inclusive guidance that pays attention to the barriers and learning needs of different groups in society. A follow-up survey after the project ended showed that 78% of clients had started training and almost all with the prospect of a diploma (Tempera, 2018).

However, career and learning guidance is offered by different services in Flanders, without any coordination (OECD, 2021). In Flanders, learning guidance is further fragmented according to the type of education. Learning guidance in primary and secondary education is organised by the CLB pupil guidance centres, in higher education by the universities or colleges themselves; in formal adult education, guidance is provided by the centres and in non-formal adult education, lifelong learning orientations can be provided by a wide range of socio-cultural organisations¹⁵.

¹⁴ Learning opportunities: the extent to which employees/self-employed persons can or cannot maintain and further develop their competencies in the interest of their long-term employability, through formal training opportunities and day-to-day experience in the workplace (SERV, 2019).

¹⁵ <https://www.euroguidance.eu/guidance-system-in-belgium-flanders>

Career guidance on the other hand is organised by the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training, VDAB. Moreover, career guidance focuses mainly on the (learning) career demand of individuals, without structural integration of labour market knowledge and competency forecasts (De Vos et al., 2021).

For information and individual guidance concerning training courses, adults can also visit the various learning shops in Flanders. Although the learning shops offer learning career guidance for all adults, they focus on target groups such as the low-qualified, prisoners or migrants. Learning shops provide services to lower the barriers to lifelong learning and the labour market. They are strongly embedded locally and (intermediary) bodies (such as VDAB, the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration, Public social welfare centre OCMW, Pupil guidance centre CLB, higher education institutions, Basic education centre CBE, trade unions, recognised mandated career centres, etc.) make use of these additional services (Learning network learning shops, 2021).

APPENDIX 2 THE MEMBERS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The Lifelong Learning Partnership was established by means of the communication to the Flemish Government on 30 October 2020 and composed of the following members (including their replacements).

- Chairperson Ans De Vos (Antwerp Management School)
- Seven members on behalf of SERV
 - Joris Renard – UNIZO
 - Jonas De Raeve – VOKA
 - Jeroen Boudewijns – Belgian Farmers' Union
 - Dirk Malfait – Verso
 - Sam Coomans – ACV-CSC
 - Sarah Lambrecht – Vlaams ABVV
 - Justine Scholiers – ACLVB (replaced by Katrien Allaert)
- Six representatives from the education landscape and training providers
 - Eddy Demeersseman - Catholic Education Flanders
 - Daisy Denolf – GO!
 - Els Willems – POV
 - Joke Drijkoningen – Ligo, Centres for Basic Education
 - Bieke Morlion – UGent
 - Marc Vandewalle – UCLL
- A representative of the local level
 - Johan Vandenbranden – OVSG
- Two representatives of the private training providers
 - Henk Dejonckheere – Alimento
 - Dirk Vanstipelen – SYNTRA Limburg (replaced by Chris Venken and Nico Nieuwborg)
- A representative of a business school
 - Dirk Buyens – Vlerick
- A representative of the Lifelong Learning Committee of the Flemish Education Council
 - Kurt Berteloot – Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen.

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