

# The **L-FACTOR** in your company or organisation

Literacy in the Workplace



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## Literacy in the Workplace



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**Flemish Government**

**Flemish Ministry  
of Education and Training**



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## Preface

We can no longer ignore the fact that the knowledge economy is making its presence felt at every level. Acquiring knowledge is not just something for highly qualified people. Even people with few qualifications need to have suitable literacy skills in the present-day economy.

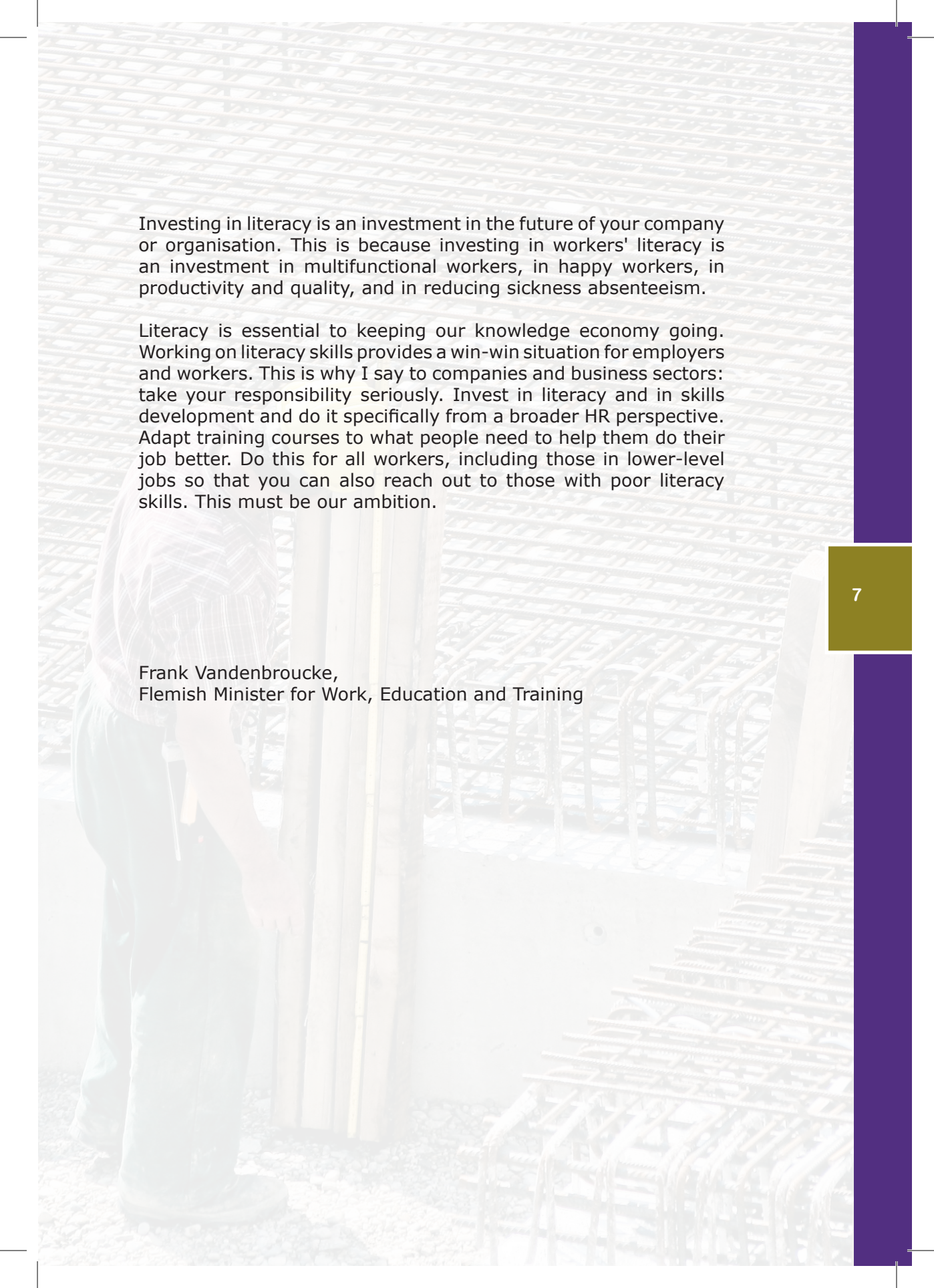
Literacy is a wide-ranging concept. It is about having all the knowledge and skills to communicate in writing and process information. This therefore includes numeracy and ICT literacy as well. Operators in a company read information on computer screens in order to guarantee the product's constant quality. Civic guards submit reports to their employers about the events of the previous day in note form. Plumbers and construction workers read work instructions, building plans and regulations. Sales people send product information to customers via email.

Nowadays companies need people who are literate at every level. This is the only way for them to continue to operate successfully in a dynamic market, in a dynamic society.

In spite of all the efforts in terms of education and training in the past, there is always a significant group of people whose functional literacy level is too low. This is a hindrance for our labour market which cannot be resolved just like that. A global approach is required.

Companies, sectors and social partners, along with the government, have a shared responsibility for helping workers develop functional literacy. However, research shows that training policies in companies are mostly restricted to technical training courses, courses for higher qualified workers and company induction courses. This means that literacy is seldom a focus point in a company's HR and training policies.

How do companies and sectors which actively work on literacy skills achieve success? They do it by embedding their literacy training in the company's quality or training policy. They also offer tailored training courses in collaboration with external literacy trainers. They also get foremen and management involved as much as possible. They also achieve this by selecting the target group according to their job rather than level of qualifications. This avoids pigeon-holing those with the lowest qualifications.



Investing in literacy is an investment in the future of your company or organisation. This is because investing in workers' literacy is an investment in multifunctional workers, in happy workers, in productivity and quality, and in reducing sickness absenteeism.

Literacy is essential to keeping our knowledge economy going. Working on literacy skills provides a win-win situation for employers and workers. This is why I say to companies and business sectors: take your responsibility seriously. Invest in literacy and in skills development and do it specifically from a broader HR perspective. Adapt training courses to what people need to help them do their job better. Do this for all workers, including those in lower-level jobs so that you can also reach out to those with poor literacy skills. This must be our ambition.

Frank Vandenbroucke,  
Flemish Minister for Work, Education and Training

## The importance of literacy



According to research, between 15 and 18% of adults in Flanders have poor literacy skills. As a result of this, they are unable to function to their maximum capacity and develop themselves further socially and at work. This has far-reaching consequences for the well-being of these people themselves, not to mention for the competitiveness of the companies and organisations where they work.

People with poor literacy have very few skills enabling them to process and produce information. For example, they are not able to give a child the right dose of medicine, based on the information on the packaging and patient information leaflet. At work they find it difficult to understand written work instructions and safety regulations and are unable to perform written work assignments or process data in an online database.

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Literacy is the ability to process information from texts, documents and statistics, as well as use computers and multimedia. It involves much more than just being able to read and write. This makes literacy an essential skill in a knowledge economy like the Flemish economy. In other words, the L-factor is very high in Flemish companies and organisations.

This is why we want to promote literacy actively in the workplace. On 22 November 2001 the Flemish Government and social partners signed the ambitious Vilvoorde Pact. This Pact intends to increase significantly the number of functionally literate people and people with ICT skills in Flanders by 2010. Companies, sectors and social partners, along with the government, must take responsibility for helping workers develop functional literacy.

The Flemish Minister for Work, Education and Training Frank Vandenbroucke wants tackling literacy to be one of the policy priorities of companies and organisations. This brochure and the related website **[www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid)** offer companies and organisations, whether from the private sector, public sector or social economy, a set of specific tools for improving literacy on a gradual basis.



This brochure provides you with an overview on literacy. You are given methods for identifying poor literacy skills at your workplace and specific tools for improving your employees' literacy.

Various companies and organisations have already adopted successful literacy initiatives. Their experiences feature in this brochure. More information about the approach used by these and other companies is available at [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid).

This brochure is intended for the following:

- Works managers
- HR managers
- Trade union representatives
- Business sectors and sector consultants
- Coaches from VDAB (Flemish Public Employment Service) and school careers advisers from SYNTRA
- RESOC (Regional Socio-economic Committees) advisers
- SERR (Socio-economic councils of the Region) advisers
- Staff from the UNIZO (Organisation for the Self-Employed and SMEs) job centre
- Staff at career centres and pathway support services
- Diversity project developers



## The L-factor in the Flemish economy



The Flemish economy's strength lies in service provision and a high level of knowledge and technical innovation. In order to be able to maintain its global competitive position, Flanders needs skilled and therefore, literate workers. Flanders stands out at an international level because of its relatively high number of people with poor literacy skills, on the one hand, and its relatively high number of people with excellent literacy skills, on the other hand.

Companies and organisations in Flanders are therefore greatly interested in making literacy a high priority in the workplace. A recent international survey indicated that, for instance, poor literacy skills cost Dutch society some EUR 500 million every year. In the UK, it was calculated that a company with a workforce of more than a thousand suffers an annual loss of GBP 500,000 because workers have inadequate skills, including literacy skills.

The growing interest in literacy is linked to developments in the economy. The main focus is the shift from production to service provision. This results in a sharp rise in the number of tasks where workers need to process information. In addition, our society is moving towards a high-tech society. Digital media are playing an ever-increasing role in the jobs that workers do. This development is taking place in both large and small companies, whether in the private or public sector.

This also affects manual workers. They are faced with the task of learning how to use new technologies. The growing use of email and the Internet increases the importance of writing skills. This requires workers to be constantly involved in self-development. Our knowledge economy can only grow if our workers grow with it.

Nowadays customers demand bespoke products, tailored to their personal wishes and delivered as soon as possible. This makes companies' production processes increasingly more customer-centric. This requires flexible workers who can interpret order

charts, put machines into operation, inspect the quality of products, monitor stock and, if possible, carry out small maintenance jobs on machines.

Workers need to have the right knowledge and skills to do this. Technical skills cannot be developed without developing basic literacy skills.



## Literacy and skills development



Since the Skills Agenda<sup>1</sup> was signed by the social partners on 14 May 2007, the Flemish Government and social partners have been committed to the development of key skills in the workplace. Working on literacy is the basis for skills development in companies and organisations.

The Skills Agenda, which has been allocated EUR 38 million, features ten priorities which must recognise and deploy the abilities of students, job-seekers and employees. The key objective is to encourage everyone to discover, develop and use their talents. The development of talent is the key element of the skills policy.

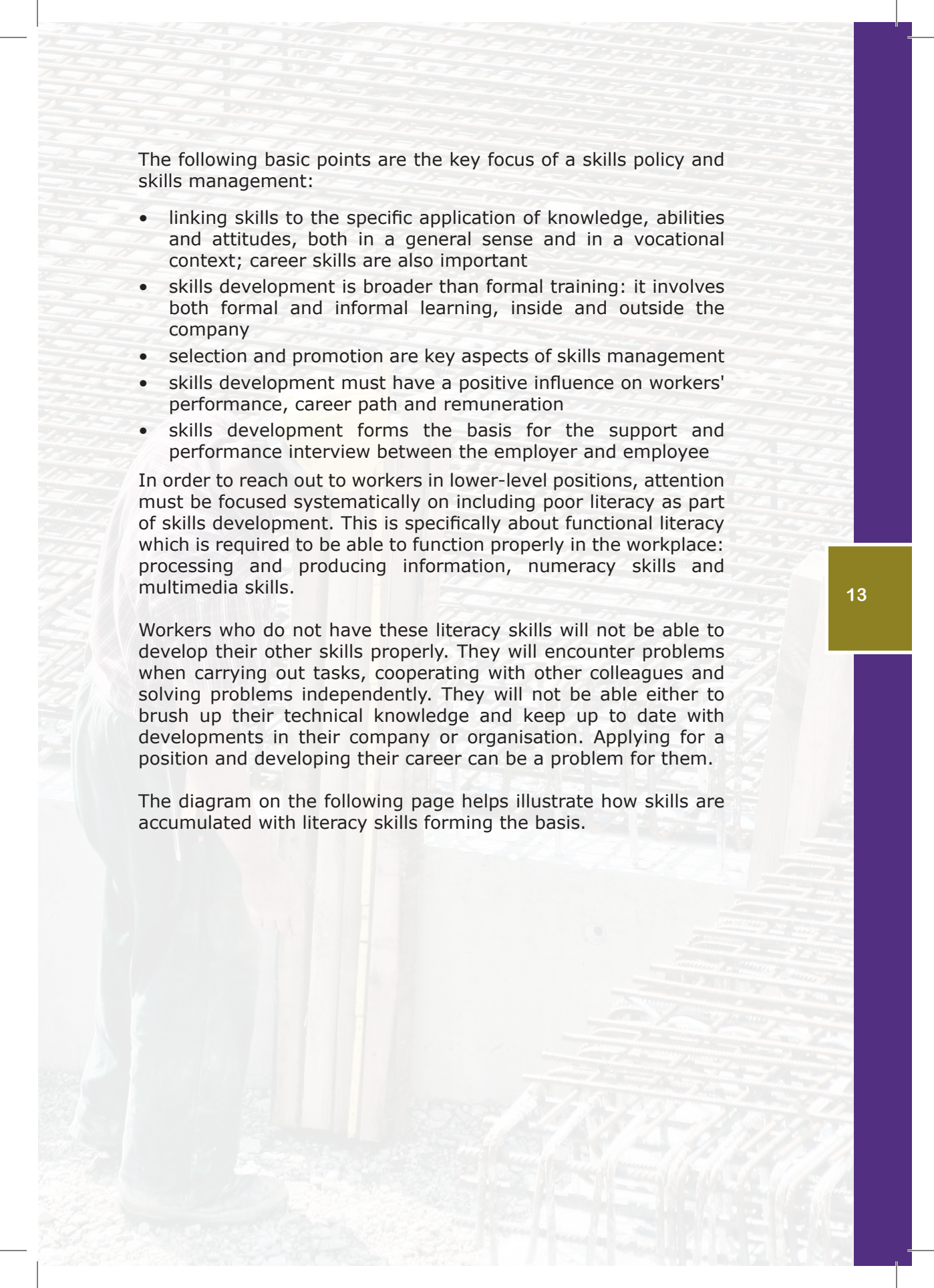
A good skills policy within companies and organisations is one of the ten action packages. It is the job of companies and organisations to develop the talents of each worker. Talent development is actually one of the key enablers, apart from innovation and international business, for guaranteeing that our economy continues to be transformed and increasing, sustainable employment is achieved.

A skills policy offers a solution to such challenges as placing the right person in the right job, preparing a company for change, taking into account the development of older workers, retaining valuable workers and promoting diversity.

A good-quality skills policy includes not only a strategic approach to skills development, but also the recognition and deployment of skills. Both these paths are interwoven and are designed according to a single framework and in relation to the business plan. Good dialogue between employees and employers is also a success factor in this.

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1 On 14 May 2007 the Flemish Government and social partners agreed on the "Competentieagenda 2010" (Skills Agenda 2010) to meet the socio-economic challenges facing Flanders. Its aim is to contribute to long-term, innovative growth and it contains 10 priorities spanning education and the workplace.



The following basic points are the key focus of a skills policy and skills management:

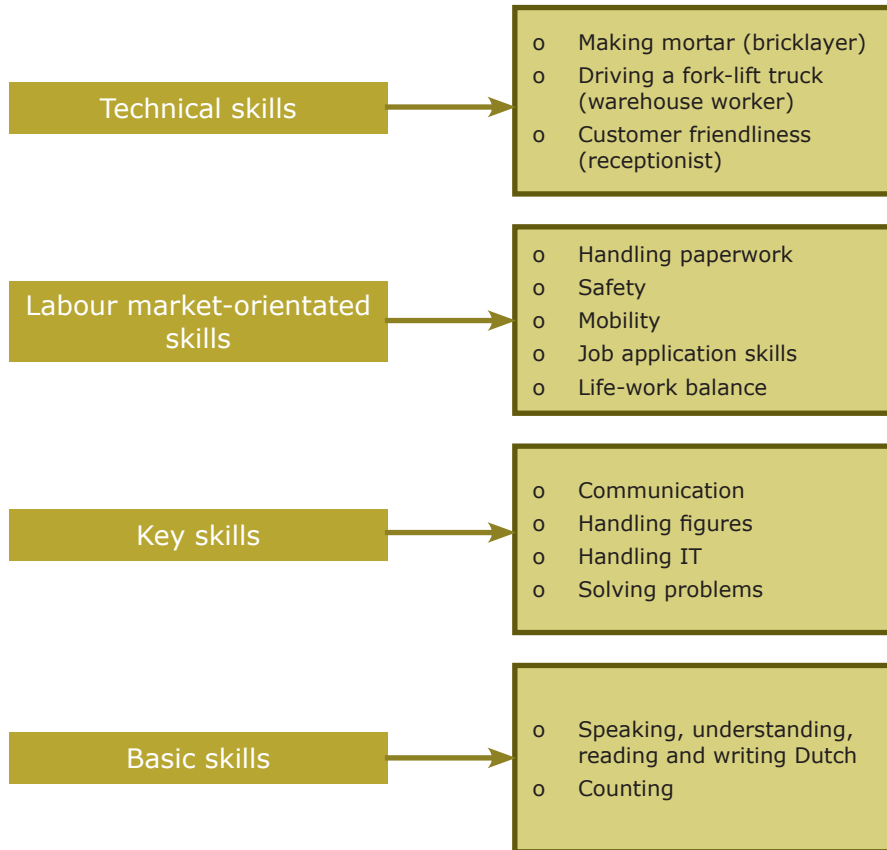
- linking skills to the specific application of knowledge, abilities and attitudes, both in a general sense and in a vocational context; career skills are also important
- skills development is broader than formal training: it involves both formal and informal learning, inside and outside the company
- selection and promotion are key aspects of skills management
- skills development must have a positive influence on workers' performance, career path and remuneration
- skills development forms the basis for the support and performance interview between the employer and employee

In order to reach out to workers in lower-level positions, attention must be focused systematically on including poor literacy as part of skills development. This is specifically about functional literacy which is required to be able to function properly in the workplace: processing and producing information, numeracy skills and multimedia skills.

Workers who do not have these literacy skills will not be able to develop their other skills properly. They will encounter problems when carrying out tasks, cooperating with other colleagues and solving problems independently. They will not be able either to brush up their technical knowledge and keep up to date with developments in their company or organisation. Applying for a position and developing their career can be a problem for them.

The diagram on the following page helps illustrate how skills are accumulated with literacy skills forming the basis.

## Examples of a skills framework



Source: Levanto

Literacy provides the basis or foundation for further skills development. Skills development, in turn, strengthens capacity, boosts innovation potential, generates more commitment from workers in the process of organisational and career development, and guarantees internal employability.

## Benefit for employer and employee


Working on literacy in the workplace results in a better performance for both the employee and company or organisation.

### Benefits for your company or organisation

- greater efficiency through fewer (production) errors
- higher product quality through better process control
- better cooperation within the company
- wider employability of staff through growth and retraining
- greater sense of responsibility among staff thanks to a better insight into the company's policy
- greater customer satisfaction
- more opportunities for expanding recruitment policy

### Benefits for your employees

- fewer industrial accidents because of a better understanding of safety regulations
- skills development throughout their whole career by developing basic skills
- better promotion prospects
- less chance of redundancy
- more opportunities for personal development with a positive consequence for their career
- greater sense of self-esteem



## City of Geel: key skills for civic guards

Geel invests a great deal in developing the skills of its low-qualified staff. ICT and communication courses for civic guards are examples of courses promoting literacy. The results are very positive. Staff feel more committed to their work. They have a greater sense of responsibility, which has boosted the quality of their work.

Cooperation also runs more smoothly and the civic guards can deal with conflicts better. This enhances the service's image. A positive upshot of this is that various civic guards have signed up for the normal, open basic education courses.

## Levanto: "Keep your key skills up to date" project

Levanto has developed over the years a skills framework to help job-seekers find and retain a job. This framework comprises basic and key skills, as well as skills aimed at the labour market and of a vocational nature. The "Keep your key skills up to date" project helps develop and adapt further the skills framework for workers performing work activities in companies. The aim is to increase workers' employability and adaptability. The project is a collaboration between the training organisation, the temporary employment sector and companies. The training takes place in the workplace.

The key skills training is made up of six modules:

- ability to communicate
- ability to handle figures
- ability to handle ICT
- ability to cooperate
- ability to handle problems
- ability to improve own learning and performance.



## Literacy in your company or organisation



Is your company or organisation facing such challenges as an ever-changing market or looking for suitable workers for a shortage occupation? Does your company or organisation attach importance to employing the right person in the right job, taking into account the development of older workers, retaining valuable workers? Do you want to promote diversity? If you do, focusing on literacy, embedded in a broader skills policy, is an important basic condition for this.

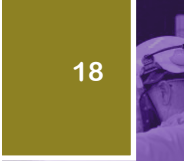
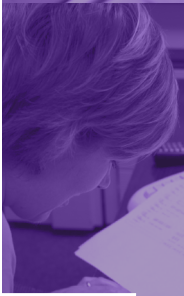
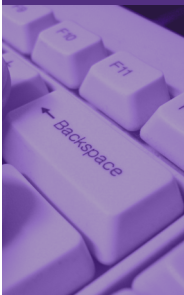
Certain groups run a higher risk of having a poor literacy level: older workers, non-native speakers, unqualified school-leavers and people with disabilities. But low literacy levels are not restricted just to these groups: according to estimates, 1 person in 7 in Flanders has poor literacy skills. It is therefore not inconceivable that poor literacy is an issue for your company or organisation too.

### **Almost every company in Flanders, big or small, has staff with poor literacy skills**

There are various factors contributing to poor literacy: low qualifications, little variation in tasks, lack of training opportunities in the workplace, a rapidly evolving market imposing ever new demands on workers etc.

#### *The L-test for your company or organisation*

Do you want to know what chance there is that workers in your company or organisation have poor literacy skills and what influence this has on your market position and company results? Go to [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) and complete *The L-test for your company or organisation*.



Guy has worked in the metal working sector for many years. He is an expert in this trade and a popular workmate. At the beginning it seemed that he could even work his way up to becoming a foreman, but in recent years he has been increasingly left behind.

Guy finds it difficult to understand the operating instructions for new machines. Until recently he used to report faults verbally, but they now must be submitted on paper. Unfortunately, writing is not his strong point.

An could not follow the theoretical part of the business course and left school without any qualifications. Fortunately, she quickly found an administrative job in a small firm. She was responsible there for stock management for a number of years, to everyone's satisfaction.

An has had problems since the department was automated. Processing and supplying data do not come that easy to her any more. On top of this, everyone now has to send their queries by email. She often does not understand the questions very well and finds it difficult to formulate a reply.

Yassin does not have a permanent job, but he works, now and then, on a temporary basis for a transport company. He hopes that he will get a permanent job through these temporary jobs. Unfortunately, he is being asked increasingly seldom to work. He has noticed that the requirements even for temporary staff are increasing. He speaks fluent Dutch, but he is not so strong at reading and writing it. He sometimes finds doing the admin for the deliveries and time recording too complicated and if the customers have queries about the delivery note, he cannot handle them very well.



## Literacy actions and company policy

There are plenty of ways to improve your workers' skills and promote their literacy.

Literacy actions must have a place in your company's or organisation's policy. It is important that you develop a vision based on the skills policy so that this policy is rooted in the strategy and operational management of the company. In order to make the skills policy acceptable to workers, having regular consultations is necessary, but without specifically focusing on workers with poor literacy skills.

You can emphasise one or more of the aspects below:

### **Safety policy**

For example: making working safer by producing safety instructions in simple Dutch so that even people with poor literacy skills can understand and apply them

### **Quality policy**

For example: improving process controls by giving workers with poor literacy skills additional training in digital and numeracy skills; increasing customer focus by providing communication skills training

### **Training policy**

For example: promoting literacy in order to improve own learning; focus on literacy among those learning on the job

### **Career/HR policy**

For example: promoting literacy as part of recruitment, changes in the organisation, growth and promotion; drawing up a personal development plan for every worker, including those with low qualifications



## **Communications policy**

For example: making corporate communications accessible to those with poor literacy skills; drawing up a Charter for plain Dutch

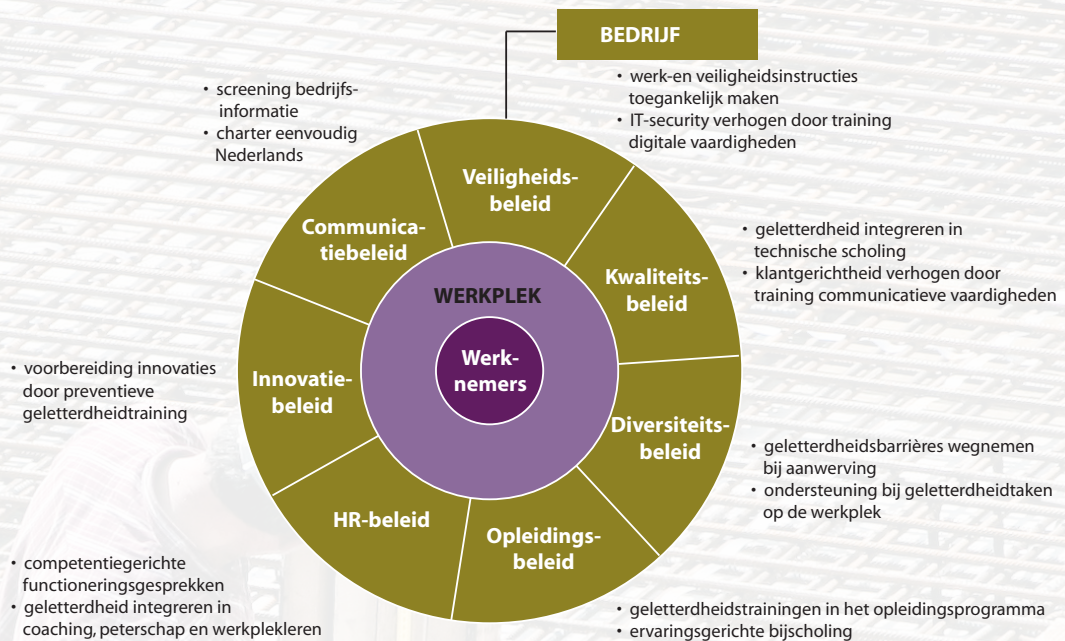
## **Innovation policy**

For example: preparing workers for innovations by providing preventive literacy training

## **Diversity policy**

For example: promoting the recruitment of vulnerable groups through literacy training and support in the workplace

Individual companies can voluntarily plan actions focusing on vulnerable groups as part of their diversity plans. They can obtain subsidies for this from the Flemish Government. At the moment 2,072 companies have drawn up plans. Although this measure is primarily aimed at vulnerable groups, such as non-native Dutch speakers, people with disabilities and people over the age of 50, where the emphasis is on taking on staff, it is also quite possible to include literacy actions tailored to companies' needs within a diversity plan. Another bonus is that the organisation receives support and consultancy free of charge for drawing up and implementing a diversity plan from a project developer from the region.



## What can you do?

**Step 1:** Decide where literacy actions fit in best with the current company or organisation policy.

⇒ Use the results of the L-test for your company or organisation on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 2:** Decide how the literacy action in this case can be included in practical terms.

### Questions for guidance

- Can parallels be found with previous actions carried out?
- Is there already a tradition of cooperation with the sector funds or other structural partners for training?
- Are there any factors linking to current actions?
- Are there any factors linking to actions planned for the near future?

**Step 3:** You can also opt to integrate literacy as part of the day-to-day activities in your company or organisation.



### Maasmechelen social business centre: literacy integrated as part of day-to-day activities

The Maasmechelen social business centre supports a range of social training and employment initiatives in sectors such as wood and metal working, recycling, assembly and packing, environmental maintenance, painting and decorating, computers and even an ironing business. There are roughly 150 people in total employed in the various initiatives.

At the social business centre, literacy, in the broadest sense of the word, is integrated into the centre's day-to-day activities. Social and communication skills, along with attitudes to work form the main part of the workers' training. Language and numeracy skills are added depending on the type of training or employment.

One particular aspect of this is the involvement of the non-profit organisation Keerpunt for providing support to the team of inspectors/foremen and advisers in identifying the needs and sticking points with staff and in communicating with staff.

## Clear corporate communication

There is no point in launching any literacy action if your company or organisation fails to make any effort to make the information which workers require to do their job as accessible as possible

Companies and organisations are often unaware of how much information workers are given to process every day, via which channels the information is supplied and which skills workers need to handle all this.

It may involve communication which is required for them to carry out their job (reading graphs and tables, going through manuals and instruction books, carrying out computer simulations, processing information via email), as well as communication which is required to enable them to function properly as an employee (safety regulations, general company information on the intranet, annual reports, announcement of company activities in the cafeteria).

In addition, workers are also asked to be able to produce information (input data, compile reports, pass on orders, write assignments).





## What can you do?

**Step 1:** Carry out a workplace analysis. Record the tasks your workers perform which relate to processing and producing information.

⇒ Use the *L-factor in the workplace* tool available on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 2:** Allow people with poor literacy and/or experts to assess different communications materials in terms of their accessibility, comprehensibility and power of persuasion.

⇒ Use the guide *Bedrijfscommunicatie screenen en aanpassen* (Screen and adapt corporate communication) on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 3:** Examine where improvements can be made.

**Step 4:** Turn these points for improvement into specific actions. Devise a plan for adapting the selected communications materials and look for any specialist partners (technical authors, communication agencies, webmasters) who can help with this.

⇒ The guide *Bedrijfscommunicatie screenen en aanpassen* (Screen and adapt corporate communication) on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) includes a number of practical tips which can help you adapt your communications materials.

**Step 5:** Evaluate the results and make any necessary further improvements.

**Step 6:** Draw up a *Plain Dutch Charter*.

Examples of some actions:

- Use of icons and photos
- Simplifying instructions
- Adapting written communication
- Writing guides in simple language



## Career-long activity

Literacy actions can be integrated as part of workers' career paths at different points.

During their career: recruitment and induction

During their career: when organisational changes take place and in the case of growth and promotion

### Recruitment and induction

Literacy can be a focus point right from the recruitment process. Your company is not going to deliberately prevent people with poor literacy skills from joining your company or organisation by setting recruitment requirements which are too high. The intention is rather to deal with the possible consequences of poor literacy in a preventive manner.

Not every position requires the same level of literacy. In addition, literacy comes in different forms: written literacy, digital literacy, numeracy.

Try to make a correct estimate of the literacy requirements for a particular job. When doing so, take into account both the actual job being carried out and the wider operation. This will prevent people from being under- or overqualified for a particular job. In other words, the ultimate aim is to find the right person for the right job.





## What can you do?

**Step 1:** When drawing up the specifications for a vacancy, check whether the required literacy skills match the actual content of the job. Have the expectations been set too high or too low?

**Step 2:** Decide on the minimum literacy skills for the vacant job.

⇒ Use the *L-factor in the workplace* tool available on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 3:** Adapt vacancies, where necessary, and make it a focus point in new vacancies.

**Step 4:** Assess the CVs submitted in terms of the required literacy skills. Is the candidate over- or under-qualified for the job? Is basic literacy training possibly required?

**Step 5:** In recruitment exams, test only the literacy skills which are required for the relevant job.

- A high literacy level is often required to obtain a good score in written exams. This can also lead unintentionally to very competent potential employees being eliminated. If necessary, replace the exams with an assessment or practical test, or adapt your exams.
- Bear in mind the current job and career development opportunities, as well as changes within your company or organisation.

## During career

The aim of literacy actions during workers' careers is to retain their maximum employability and improve their ability to adapt in the event of changes within the company or organisation.

## In the event of changes within the organisation


If your company or organisation operates in a rapidly changing market, it may be a good idea to implement preventive literacy actions and not wait until people encounter problems. A company restructure, technological changes or stricter regulations can provide the opportunity for a literacy action.

### What can you do?

**Step 1:** Decide whether your workers need to be ready for changes. Do the changes entail higher literacy requirements? Can preventive actions be taken?

**Step 2:** Decide whether these preventive literacy actions are best targeted at individual workers or a wider group (e.g. a particular department in the company or organisation).

**Step 3:** Look for the right literacy training for the relevant workers in good time.



### Flemish Government: literacy skills during restructuring and automation

About five years ago, the Flemish Government abolished Level E (primary education level). Staff on Level E were put on or reassigned to Level D. Great care was taken to provide these executives with a modified job content and to ensure that they could be integrated and develop at their own pace at Level D.

At Level D executives are constantly faced with tasks which are disappearing or being automated. These executives are therefore provided with a bespoke training programme. This includes training in both computer and writing skills. The programme also includes how to use Excel and deal with customers in a friendly manner on the telephone. This programme was provided by both internal and external organisations.

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### Duracell: literacy along with technological and corporate organisational changes

As a result of a number of technological and corporate organisational changes in the mid-1990s, Duracell had to make efforts to provide training for low-qualified workers in the company. The management decided on the following objectives:

- the change in process control techniques required a higher level of operator
- rapid technological development required staff offering broad employability
- the change in the corporate organisation required operators to be more involved in the production process

## Change of job and promotion to a higher position

Even when workers are given a different job or are promoted to a higher position, literacy-related problems can arise. For example, the new job may require basic ICT knowledge or the need to produce written reports, which was not the case before.

A progress or performance appraisal is the best opportunity for bringing up the need for literacy training.

### What can you do?

**Step 1:** Always be on the lookout for signs which may indicate a literacy issue.

⇒ Use the guide *De G-competentie van werknemers* (Workers' L-competency) on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 2:** If you suspect there is a literacy problem, bring it up during a progress or performance appraisal.

⇒ Use the guide *De G-competentie van werknemers* (Workers' L-competency) on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 3:** Find specific solutions for improving literacy.

**Step 4:** In the case of a promotion, it is important to focus on relevant literacy skills which are expected of the worker. Is he or she aware of this? Does he or she have these skills? Discuss these expectations specifically in order to be able to identify any shortcomings.

**Step 5:** Discuss with the worker what additional literacy training he or she needs.

Preventive actions include the following benefits:

- The loss of technically skilled workers and their output is avoided.
- Workers are not targeted or stigmatised because the literacy actions are linked to developments in the company or organisation, or to the job and not the person.



## Generating support

A literacy action only has any chance of success if there is support for it among the workers themselves, the management, the works council and trade unions. All the stakeholders must understand the importance of improving literacy, as part of general skills development, and be ready to commit to this.

### Management

Managers are the obvious people to specify where literacy needs to be worked on in the organisation. However, poor literacy is difficult to detect. A manager will not always recognise this problem as such. It must therefore be ensured that senior and middle management become aware of the role of literacy in your company or organisation.

#### Duracell and Bosch: statistical process controls and key skills

The advance in process control techniques required operators to have an ever-increasing level of skills. This meant the need for a course in statistical process controls at Duracell and Bosch.

It was Duracell's management (HR) which initiated the training. The Hageland Basic Education Centre was responsible for the preliminary survey and the content of the bespoke course. As a result of the preliminary survey, key skills such as communication, problem solving and cooperation were added to the basic package.

Managers at Bosch were responsible for initiating the training, more specifically, the quality engineers. The Basic Education Centre provides theoretical training outside the company, while the quality engineers provide customised training in the company.



## The role of social partners

Literacy must be made a priority topic of discussion during social dialogue. A large number of companies which promote skills development in an innovative manner do this in a positive dialogue with their workers. The social partners have committed themselves as part of the Skills Agenda to include a skills policy and skills development in sector agreements and collective labour agreements.

### Unifine Logistics: skills development in the event of collective redundancy

Unifine Logistics is part of the Unifine Business Group, an international producer and supplier in the food industry. In 2004 the company's logistics activities were outsourced, which meant that the NV Unifine Logistics site in Meer had to be shut down. This resulted in collective redundancy for the staff. With the aim of mitigating the consequences of this action, a collective labour agreement was signed and a re-employment cell set up for collective outplacement.

The collective labour agreement offered the redundant workers the opportunity for outplacement support. Entitlement to social security benefit was linked to this support. If the redundant workers did not take part in any training and employment initiatives as part of the outplacement support, they lost their social security entitlement. Unifine Logistics opted to sign a collective labour agreement on skills policy. This guaranteed support from the social partners.



## Motivating workers

It is not so easy to motivate every worker to attend a training course aimed at improving their literacy.

The following focus points may help:

- Point out to workers the importance of the training in helping them operate in the workplace without stigmatising them.
- Put workers in touch with colleagues who have already attended the training.
- Look for a level of training which suits the target group.

Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB): friendly introduction to computers

The “Friendly Introduction to Computers” course provided by the VDAB is not given by ICT specialists, but by people involved in subsidiary professions who have functional ICT skills. This promotes accessibility for and communication with the participants. The training uses mobile computer networks (teaching portables) which can be used at both internal and external locations.

The course makes ICT accessible to the participants, allowing them to enjoy their first positive experience with this. The aim is to boost the participants’ self-confidence and motivate them to take other training courses.

The provision of training and courses in the workplace also offers an opportunity. It is particularly useful in:

- integrating new workers into their workplace and familiarising them with the company’s information and infrastructure.
- helping workers to learn how to use a new machine or infrastructure.
- teaching workers a difficult skill where they need to actually put it into practice.
- enabling workers to acquire skills which are very specific to a particular job or workplace to facilitate their integration into this workplace.
- enabling knowledge to be put into practice as flexibly as possible.



## Cooperation with training organisations

In addition to various forms of informal and non-formal learning within the company or organisation, the services of a host of training organisations can be called upon in order to improve literacy.

If you are looking for a training organisation with experience, able to offer you a training provision tailored to the needs of your company or organisation, there are different organisations available to help you with this. In addition to agencies such as the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB), SYNTRA Flanders, educational institutes and trade-union training institutions, there is a large number of commercial organisations which can organise training and courses for companies, with a specific focus on literacy.

### Syntra West: literacy integrated into a technical training course

Syntra West offers certified hands-on training courses in different business sectors in West Flanders. Judging from contacts with production companies, there seems to be a great shortage of technically qualified staff. Based on experiences with a number of bespoke courses in companies, Syntra West developed a training pathway for training production workers to become maintenance engineers.

Given that, as maintenance engineers, production workers have to get involved in new tasks involving more communication, literacy is integrated as part of the technical training. Literacy is understood in the broad sense of the word. The course includes not only training in producing reports, but also in problem solving and listening and questioning techniques.

## What can you do?

**Step 1:** Does your company or organisation perhaps already have a tradition of cooperating with a sector fund or other training partner? In this case, contact the sector consultant or the relevant training agency and see whether they can provide a bespoke literacy course.

**Step 2:** If not, check which training agencies are available in your area whose services you can call upon to support your literacy actions.

⇒ Use the list *Opleidingen geletterdheid* (Literacy courses) on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.

**Step 3:** Put together a literacy training course with the trainer.

⇒ Use the checklist *Geletterdheidstrainingen organiseren* (Organising literacy training) on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid) to do this.



## Financial incentives

There are different financial incentives for adopting literacy-related initiatives for both companies and workers.

### Companies

The key support measures for companies are:

- European Social Fund (ESF) / Flemish resources for mobilising talent
- Budget for Economic Advice (BEA)
- Subsidies as part of diversity plans

### Workers

There are also training subsidies for workers:

- Training cheques for workers
- Training credit (as part of time credit system)
- Allowances and leave for professional improvement
- Sector regulations

There are also different forms of training leave:

- Paid educational leave
- Leave in recognition of acquired skills

More information about these regulations is available on [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid).

## More information

Do you strongly believe in the importance of literacy in your company or organisation and want to find out more information or find out about specific tools?

Visit [www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid](http://www.vlaanderen.be/geletterdheid)

You will find the following on this website:

- Tools for identifying literacy problems in your company or organisation
- Tips on how to set up a literacy training course
- A guide on screening and adapting your corporate communications materials
- A guide on recording your workers' literacy skills during a progress or performance appraisal
- How to promote good literacy practices
- Examples of literacy actions adopted in Flemish companies and organisations
- Information about training bodies in your area

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