KeyCoNet (2012 – 2014) is a European policy network focused on identifying and analyzing initiatives on the implementation of key competences in primary and secondary school education.

On the basis of the evidence collected through literature reviews, case studies, peer learning visits, country overviews, videos and exchanges between network members, the project’s final objective is to produce recommendations for policy and practice regarding the enablers and obstacles to a holistic implementation of key competence development.

Among KeyCoNet’s current 18 partners in 10 countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), are Ministries of Education/related agencies, universities/research institutes, European organizations, and practice related partners. KeyCoNet also has a growing number of associate members from other countries and stakeholder groups, steadily increasing our network’s scope and influence.
CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY ...................................................... 6
BASIC INFORMATION ............................................................ 8
SUMMARY ............................................................................. 10
INTRODUCTION ..................................................................... 11
1. CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE .............................................. 12
2. SUBSTANCE RELATED ISSUES ...................................... 15
3. PARTNERSHIP RELATED ISSUES .................................. 18
4. STRATEGY RELATED ISSUES ........................................ 20
5. MAINSTREAMING RELATED ISSUES ............................. 27
6. SYSTEMIC ASPECTS ....................................................... 28
7. EVALUATION RELATED ISSUES .................................... 32
8. ACHIEVEMENT OF INITIATIVES AIM ............................ 36
9. NEXT STEPS .................................................................... 40
Part of a series
This case study is part of a series of case studies being produced by KeyCoNet, to highlight various initiatives concerning key competence development, taking place across Europe. Each case study analyzes the initiative’s implementation strategies in depth, and will feed into the network’s recommendations for policy and practice on how to implement a key competence approach in schools most effectively.

How and why was this case selected?
Each year the KeyCoNet network identifies initiatives concerning key competence development across Europe, and a case note is produced providing basic information about each one. Following this, network partners participate in an online selection according to pre-established criteria, as well as an in-depth face-to-face discussion, in order to select the most interesting initiatives to develop into case studies.

This Belgian case was of particular interest to the network because of its cross-curricular nature, and system wide approach. The curricular reform introduces cross-curricular objectives related to knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are to be pursued by all secondary level students in Flanders. While schools are not obliged to assess students in their achievement of the cross-curricular objectives, they nevertheless must show evidence to the inspectorate, which is following the reform closely, that the objectives are clearly part of the school’s teaching and learning plans. This case was also selected by the network because of its stage of development, as 2012-2013 has been the first year that the inspectorate has officially evaluated schools’ implementation of the new objectives. Schools are free to choose the way in which to implement the cross-curricular objectives, and interestingly, as this case study illustrates, project-based learning is often the preferred route.

Which methodology has been used?
Case studies are the main tool used by the network to probe beneath the surface of each selected initiative and provide a rich context for understanding the implementation issues involved. The initiatives selected by the network differ in many ways, according to the nature of the key competences addressed, the implementation process used, the number of students and teachers directly concerned, the type and number of actors involved, and the duration and stage of development etc. A multiple-case study design, whereby each initiative generates its own case study, but uses one single prism for a common analysis, was therefore chosen. This method makes it possible to explore diversity, as well as the enablers and obstacles to the initiative’s implementation, as perceived by the initiators and stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, through a multiple-case study design it is possible to identify choices, strategies, characteristics, situations or contexts leading to success or failure in a recurrent manner. This will particularly contribute to fuelling the set of recommendations for policy and practice at institutional, local, regional, national and European level, for the effective implementation of key competences in school education.

Each case study included interviews with the initiative’s coordinators and stakeholders, as well as desk research. In some cases, where considered feasible and fruitful, focus groups were also organized. For this particular case study, Sara Fobelets (Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training) interviewed teachers from three schools and two developers/inspectors about the implementation of the VOET@2010. The text refers also to research from the Educational Mirror1, in which another 48 school actors were interviewed in school year 2010-2011.

1 In the Education Mirror, the inspectorate offers an annual report on the quality of the education in Flanders. The inspectorate mapped how schools were handling the evolution from the old to the new VOET. To do so they processed 48 questionnaires and interviews with people responsible for the VOET at schools between October 2010 and March 2011.
**BASIC INFORMATION**

**Country:** Belgium – Flemish education

**Title of initiative:**
- [NL] VOET@2010 (vakoverschrijdende eindtermen@2010)
- [EN] Cross-curricular final objectives@2010

**Coordinator/Organization:** Flemish Ministry of Education and Training

**Key competences addressed:**
- [NL] Communicatie in de moedertaal (minimal);
- [NL] Communicatie in vreemde talen (minimal);
- [NL] Wiskundige competentie en basiscompetenties op het gebied van exacte wetenschappen en technologie (only technology competences);
- [NL] Digitale competentie
- [NL] Leercompetentie
- [NL] Sociale en burgerschapscompetentie
- [NL] Ontwikkeling van initiatief en ondernemerszin
- [NL] Cultureel bewustzijn en culturele expressie

**Type of initiative and channels used for implementation (e.g. curriculum reform introduced through legislation etc.)**
Curriculum reform introduced through legislation

**Scope:**
- The objectives are developed on community level (education in Belgium is governed by the communities: the Flemish, French and German speaking communities each have their own education system, which is implemented in each school).

**Learning context:**
- Formal

**School education level/s:**
- Secondary (lower and upper)

**Target groups:**
Pupils from grade 1 (12 years old) to 6 (18 years old) of secondary education (also teachers, curriculum designers, Flemish Educational Council, Government bodies, Educational Network)

**Time frame:**
1 September 2010 – on-going

**Relevant links:**

**Partners:**
No information provided

**Scope:**
- (student/teacher/school level; local/regional/national)

**Learning context:**
- (formal or non-formal)

**School education level/s:**
- (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary)

**Target groups:**
- Pupils from grade 1 (12 years old) to 6 (18 years old) of secondary education (also teachers, curriculum designers, Flemish Educational Council, Government bodies, Educational Network)

**Time frame:**
- 1 September 2010 – on-going

**Relevant links:**
SUMMARY

The ‘first generation’ of cross-curricular final objectives was introduced by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2001, shifting the emphasis from a subject-oriented logic to a more integrated education. These objectives were reviewed and updated in 2010, a process which led to the creation of VOET@2010 (Cross-curricular final objectives@2010).

The cross-curricular final objectives concern physical health and safety, mental health/wellbeing, socio-relational development, the environment for sustainable development, political-juridical society, socio-economic society, socio-cultural society, learning to learn and ICT. The objectives address all key competences at some level and, since 1 September 2010, every Flemish secondary school is required to implement them.

The final objectives describe a basic package of themes that the school is accountable for implementing over the six years of secondary education. Schools are free to determine their own way of implementing the cross-curricular themes within different subjects, projects, activities, etc. and while schools are not under obligation to achieve the final objectives, they are obliged to make the highest possible effort to achieve them as far as possible.

INTRODUCTION

The Cross-Curricular Final Objectives (VOET) are minimum targets in terms of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes that are not specific to one subject, but that are pursued in secondary education through several subjects, educational projects and other activities.

Between 1997 and 2002 the first generation of the objectives was introduced. These were later revised and the new VOET were introduced in 2010.

The new VOET@2010 consists of objectives that are structured in a common trunk, seven contexts (physical health and safety, mental health, socio-relational development, environment and sustainable development, political-legal society, socio-economic society and socio-cultural society), learning to learn, ICT and technical-technological education. The VOET@2010 covers all European key competences and safeguards a broad and harmonious basic training that includes essential knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The English translation of the VOET@2010 is provided in appendix 1.
1. CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE

Which contextual factors have been perceived as enablers to the implementation of the initiative, and why?

The following factors can be seen as ‘enablers’ (the following points have been taken from the interviews with at least one of the three schools):

- **Infrastructure of the school**: in a small school the teacher is sometimes required to organise extracurricular activities; this has the possible effect of making teachers think more creatively about cross-curricular activities.

- **Student population**: different projects can be interesting depending on the student population of the school; e.g. students who are not used to using public transport can learn how to do so (objective: to use transportation in a sustainable way).

- **School Inspections**: in the run-up to an investigation schools will pay extra attention to their VOET policy as they want to receive a positive report from the inspectorate.

**Scientific basis for the VOET**: the developers/inspectors indicated that the majority of the perceptions of school heads/teachers that emerged from scientific research need were taken into consideration in the development of VOET@2010³. For example, based on this research the VOET were phrased using simple language.


A noticeable difference between two schools in terms of enablers was the following:

- **No major change**: teachers were reassured that the work they were already doing could be preserved in the new VOET.

- **Innovation**: teachers were motivated by the fact that more projects would be executed and more cross-curricular work would be carried out.

Which contextual factors have been perceived as obstacles to the implementation of the initiative, and why?

Various ‘enablers’ can at the same time also represent obstacles:

- **Infrastructure of the school**: compared to larger schools (e.g. schools with large playgrounds) the teacher in small schools is more likely to be ‘obliged’ to go outside the school premises, this may constitute an obstacle to the implementation of the VOET.

- **Student population**: depending on the student population it may prove very difficult to organise projects; e.g. if students cannot use public transportation independently the school always needs to be the starting point.

- **School Inspections**: A visit from the inspectorate can entail extra stress for the school staff; e.g. teachers must record all the VOET that they intend to cover, something that they are not always keen to do.

- **Scientific basis for the VOET**: the developers/inspectors indicated that some of the opinions of principals/teachers that emerged from the research were not taken into consideration. Some subjects of the VOET (such as sexuality) were very sensitive, but because they were deemed too important they were not dropped.
The following issues can also be obstacles (according to at least one of the schools interviewed):

- **Too many changes**: for some teachers the introduction of the VOET felt like yet another change.
- **Complexity**: the VOET are fairly complicated for teachers.
- **Different priorities**: school administration chooses to focus on other priorities (e.g. truancy, being on time) and as a result pays less attention to the VOET policy. Sometimes the administration finds it necessary to focus on other priorities because, for example, the continued existence of the school is at risk due to a negative report (for issues other than the VOET).
- **Uncertainty**: the switch from the old to the new VOET was fairly rapid. Furthermore, the educational guidance service (PBD) was not sure of the best way for the abstract goals to be translated into practice. It was also unclear how the school needed to account for the way they worked on the VOET. It therefore took quite some time before the school found the right direction.
- **Increased burden of planning**: teachers had to register which VOET they had worked on.
- **Resistance towards innovation**: teachers reason from the perspective of their own subject, taking only their own curriculum into consideration rather than the VOET.
- **Lack of time**: two schools cited a lack of time to dedicate to the VOET. There is also not enough time to elaborate a proper vision concerning the VOET within a school team.

---

2. **SUBSTANCE RELATED ISSUES**

Which substance related issues have been the most difficult to fix when deciding on the content of the initiative, and why?

An *initial choice* with regard to the implementation of the VOET in schools is at which stage of secondary education the VOET should be dealt with. Schools are allowed to decide for themselves when and how the implementation will take place. The developers/inspectors indicated that it takes effort to move from the VOET to concrete actions. The choices made by schools in this regard can, for example, differ depending on the student population (for example primarily privileged or underprivileged students) and different schools therefore handle this in very different ways.

- In one school, the administration determined the division of the objectives in consultation with the ‘stage study group’, which includes the teachers responsible for a certain level. In this instance they mainly looked at which subjects the VOET corresponded to and at what age certain VOET could best be offered. The group decided on a division of the objectives, which was agreed by the school’s teachers. The division, outlined below, stipulates prioritised contexts, but VOET from other contexts can also be discussed.

  - First stage (12-14 years): primarily the contexts of physical health and safety, mental health and environment and sustainable development.
    - e.g. the promotion of healthy food should be introduced as early as possible. Students are offered a healthy breakfast for one euro.

---

4 *An educational guidance service (PBD) ensures professional internal support for schools and centres. Schools can call upon the PBD for educational and methodological advisory services (innovation projects, self-evaluation projects, support initiatives).*

5 *Flemish secondary education consists of 3 stages of 2 years. The VOET apply to the entire secondary education, i.e. to all 3 stages.*
• Second stage (14-16 years): primarily the contexts of socio-relational development, environment and sustainable development and socio-cultural society.
  - At this age children are very interested and involved in relationships and forming their own identity. e.g. playing a game about their future.
• Third stage (16-18 years): primarily the contexts of political-judicial society, socio-economical society and socio-cultural society.
  - At this age children broaden their perspective: activities include a visit to the European Parliament and a project about municipal elections.
• Another school did not establish a division. Due to a lack of time they also did not verify whether all VOET had been covered. They continued to work in their usual way and their vision on the VOET fits in with their education project, which places importance on student-focused methods. Even before the implementation of the VOET the school was already working on a number of projects (e.g. solidarity project – global education). They did notice that there was a gap in terms of citizenship and health education and this was addressed further with the help of a project. From the next school year, the school intends to review their programme to determine if there are any other gaps or areas in which the school can develop further.
• In the last school the subject study groups, made up of teachers of a particular subject, registered which VOET they already worked on during their classes. They produced a learning pathway per subject and per stage to show when each VOET is offered. However, they did not make a complete overview for the entire school to decide when to offer certain VOET. The PBD also produced a learning pathway that is inspiring to the school. The school favours a flexible approach to offers of collaboration from external sources, meaning that different projects may be featured every school year.

Research from the Education Mirror shows that schools focus primarily on the VOET trunk, the contexts and learning to learn. The intrinsic choices concerning the approach to the new VOET show less attention being paid to ICT, technical-technological education and integration and coherence.

A second choice to be made is the way in which the VOET are registered. Again, the schools took very different paths.
• One school first looked for their own system to register the VOET. Every subject study group reviewed which objectives they were already working on. However, due to a lack of time the school did not make an overview of this. After this review, private organisations such as VOETI (http://www.voetlink.be/) offered an electronic registration system. Subsequently the school moved to the use of smartschool, as a result of which yet another registration system was introduced. Smartschool allows schools to verify whether their work on all of the VOET is sufficient. Teachers went about registration in different ways: some selected a particular VOET just once, regardless of the number of times they had worked on that objective, while others selected the VOET each time they worked on it. The school will provide further instructions on this process next year. The registration of the VOET remains a learning process.
• Another school registered the first generation VOET using VOETlink. In a negative report by the inspectorate, the school was reminded that working on the VOET is more than simply registration. With the new VOET, a spider diagram (paper copy) was drawn up for each activity; this required continuous indication of which goals of the trunk and which context(s) were being worked on. These spider diagrams were then collected in a shared folder. The following school year the school had other concerns, and registering the VOET faded into the background and the number of spider diagrams that were submitted de-
creased (even though the same number of activities took place). From the next school year the school will work with a new electronic registration system.

• The last school used the filing cards provided by the PBD for registering the VOET.

A **third choice** to be made is the way in which a school can verify whether working on the VOET results in sufficient quality. This will be discussed further in point 8 (Evaluation).

• One school said that it was better to make decisions regarding many of these choices in advance. It would be better if the process were clearly indicated from the outset (i.e. if schools were told to work this way, register the VOET this way and evaluate the VOET/VOET policy this way). This would be possible with the development of registration and evaluation tools that schools can use as soon as the VOET are implemented.

### 3. Partnership Related Issues

**Which key aspects should be taken into consideration when defining the partnership?**

When organising projects as part of the VOET, schools collaborate with many different organisations. Some examples of these are health organisations, drug prevention organisations, environmental organisations, cultural centres, schools in the Walloon province, libraries, colleges (with regard to learning how to make college/university choices), local police, NGOs such as Broedelijken Delen (Fraternal Sharing) or the Red Cross, employers’ organisations such as Unizo (with regard to entrepreneurship), unions, health insurance companies, churches and mosques, etc. These organisations often set up projects outside of the classroom and offer a complete programme (preparation, project, post-processing).

According to all three schools the cost price is an important factor for choosing organisations. The organisation Kleur Bekennen (Taking Sides), for example, provides free material. One school reported that the implementation of the VOET had led to a search for funding. By submitting project proposals they would, for example, receive funds from the province, the city or the King Boudewijn Foundation.

In addition, the following criteria can also play a role in the choice of partner organisations (mentioned by at least one school):

• preference for a local organisation;
• a positive evaluation from a previous collaboration (i.e. quality of the organisation).

Schools also call on their educational guidance service (PBD) for support in implementing the VOET. The PBD can, for example, come to the school to offer further explanations on the vision behind the VOET, produce a learning pathway (when to introduce each VOET), provide help in finding the best registration system for the school, etc.

The developers/inspectors indicated that schools often work with a ‘VOET study group’. These generally consist of members of the school staff: the school administration, heads of the different subjects and all other persons involved (for example a teacher who has a lot of expertise on a specific theme). The school’s policy regarding the VOET is elaborated within this study group.
4. STRATEGY RELATED ISSUES

Which aspects of the strategy implemented for the initiative have proved to be particularly effective, and why?

In this section we will provide details of support provided by the steering committee, the government, the educational guidance service (PBD) and the school.

Steering committee

The developers/inspectors indicated that during the first generation VOET a steering committee provided support for the implementation process. This steering committee included members of the governmental curriculum department, school inspectors, experts (scientists, academics) and sometimes also representatives of the PBD (also responsible for supervising the implementation of the VOET, see below). Cross-curricular work was very new at the time and needed a lot of support. Furthermore, the steering committee collected information on the implementation process, leading to the decision to revise the first generation VOET. The creation of the second generation VOET was also in part supervised by the steering committee, creating a broader basis for the updating process. In 2009 the government’s curriculum department was reorganised and the steering committee was suspended.

Government

The government developed the VOET together with teachers, school administration, educational guidance supervisors, teacher trainers, and experts from colleges/universities. This increased the engagement and support from all stakeholders. Following the VOET development process, a response group including stakeholders from the different fields was formed to provide a written feedback on the process. Some stakeholders were also interviewed. This feedback enabled a broader and less formal review of the material developed, leading to extra input and increased support.

The government communicated the VOET in different ways:

- The government produced a VOET@2010 brochure, which lists the updated objectives and also offers all necessary information about the update (what, how and why). A hard copy of this brochure was sent by post to all schools.
- The government also drafted basic principles including the focus of the update, further explanations of the trunk, the contexts and learning to learn and also providing details of the coherence between the trunk and the contexts. These basic principles, together with a list of FAQs, was published on the www.akov.be website.
- The magazines Klasse voor Ouders (Parents’ Class), Klasse voor leerkrachten (Teachers’ Class) and Klasse voor leerlingen (Students’ Class) communicated the new VOET to the general public.
- Many organisations approached the government with a request for further explanation of the VOET, upon which the government provided information sessions (see point 4 partnership).

The inspectorate is currently developing an examination tool with which the inspectorate will check how the implementation of the VOET@2010 is taking place. This tool was tested at a number of schools during the 2012-2013 school year.

---

6 The English translation of these basic principles is provided in appendix 2.
Educational guidance service

All schools indicated that the educational guidance service (PBD) offered a great deal of support during the implementation of the VOET.

The Education Mirror 2012 shows that 81% of schools have called on their PBD for support with regard to the VOET. More than half of these schools expressed a need for support in ‘integration and coherence’. Schools were unsure how to tackle this aspect and did not know how they could gain an insight into the VOET, both as a whole and with all the possible combinations of different VOET. A third of the schools requested support regarding the common trunk and the contexts, in which there is great need for examples of best practice. For ‘learning to learn’, schools requested support for implementing a cross-curricular approach.

The Education Mirror 2012 reported that almost half of the schools called upon the PBD for help with professional development regarding the VOET.

At one of the schools interviewed in this case study, the educational guidance supervisor supported the staff meetings by passing on agenda items regarding to the VOET. To achieve better results in the 2010 inspection the supervisor also helped the school to develop a plan to achieve better results (see section 7: Systemic Aspects).

The PBD also helps with the VOET registration. One school mentioned that the PBD delivered a document for quality assurance, allowing a kind of inventory and evaluation to be drafted digitally. One school indicated that the PBD registered which VOET were addressed in most of their ‘own curricula’

were addressed in most of their ‘own curricula’. If a school was working on certain ‘own curricula’, they therefore automatically worked on those VOET.

One school mentioned that the PBD also offered suggestions for how to work on the VOET and two schools talked about the support they received in preparation for the visit to their school by the inspectorate.

School

The basic principles of the VOET state that the new planning framework for the VOET requires the school to develop its policy autonomously in terms of accountability and policy-making capacity. The expertise of the administration and teachers, cooperation, consultation and school planning offer plenty of guarantees to do justice to the principle of subsidiarity. This means that many decisions regarding the implementation of the cross-curricular final attainment levels can be made at school level rather than at a higher level.

It is the responsibility of the individual school and its teachers to decide how, when, by whom and in which subjects or projects efforts are made to achieve these final attainment levels. Furthermore, the school's education project, the expertise and professional development of teaching staff, the students, the school environment and current events are all contributing factors.

The government expects every stage at every school to make a reasonable effort towards achieving the VOET as a whole.

---

7 In Flanders, schools have to achieve minimum attainment targets. They have to include these targets in their 'own curricula' where they can also add more targets.
The Education Mirror 2012 indicates that the administration at all the interviewed schools and 90% of the teachers are aware of the new VOET concept (statistics for the 2010-2011 school year, at the start of the VOET@2010). Furthermore it emerged that the (stage) coordinators at most schools are assigned an important task regarding the implementation of the VOET, often working with a VOET study group. A considerable number of schools work on the VOET within several separate study groups, without coordinating the whole.

Of the schools interviewed in this case study, one worked with a VOET coordinator, one worked with working groups and the third school does not have a VOET policy.

Education Mirror 2012: It is interesting to note that schools have tended to organise the execution of the new VOET through projects rather than subjects. It would appear that it is easier to adapt and register projects to the VOET process, and it is also not necessary to give every individual team member a share of the responsibility in a project-based approach.

Research by the Education Mirror 2012 shows that about half of schools communicated with other schools regarding the VOET. This communication aimed at exchanging expertise and, in the long term, creating a common approach between schools and increasing support.

Other
In order to register the VOET, schools use digital registration systems, such as Smartschool. This can help to make work on the VOET easier to evaluate and is also a starting point to verify which VOET are already being worked on.

Which aspects of the strategy implemented for the initiative have proven to be most problematic, and why?

In this section we will provide details of the problematic aspects of the support provided by the steering committee, the government, the educational guidance service (PBD), the school and we will also discuss the need for support.

Steering committee
The steering committee was suspended after the reorganisation of the governmental curriculum department. During the first generation VOET, this steering committee had closely supervised the implementation. There is now therefore less supervision of the implementation, although the inspectorate and the PBD still remain in contact regarding support for and evaluation of the VOET.

Government
According to the developers/inspectors it is difficult for a government to be a ‘supportive factor’, considering the freedom of education in Flanders\(^8\), where the responsibility for implementation lies with the schools and the PBDs. Dutch-speaking Belgium has a very strong autonomy in education; the government, PBDs, teacher training colleges and schools all work independently and as a result cooperation is not self-evident.

The inspectorate is currently developing an evaluation tool that may be ready for use as of the 2013-2014 school year. One school is of the opinion that such a tool should already have been in place in 2010.

Educational guidance service (PBD)

The quality of the PBD proves to be greatly dependant on the individual, and can offer good but also mediocre support. One school explained that the PBD did not know how to do everything and that as a result it was necessary for the school to go out and investigate for themselves.

One school claimed that the PBD regards the completion of the ‘own curricula’ and subject-based attainment targets as its core business. The school stated that 90% of the work carried out by schools was towards their own curricula and subject-based attainment targets, while only 10% was towards the VOET.

School

According to one school the VOET policy is sometimes more difficult to implement in smaller schools. Due to the small scale of the school there is no separate VOET coordinator, which therefore means less support.

The developers/inspectors observed that the practical application of the VOET can sometimes be difficult. They stated that if they were to redevelop the VOET now, they would also include ‘learning to learn’ in subjects (rather than as a cross-curricular feature), since many teachers lack sufficient knowledge of educational psychology or have difficulty applying this concept in practice.

Other

The developers/inspectors indicated that the digital screening tools that are being developed may lead to merely becoming a checklist rather than something that will be incorporated into practice. They stated that it is important for the school to use the VOET as a starting point from which to build upon.

Need for support

Two of the interviewed schools in this case study stated opposing needs in terms of support:

- According to one school, it would be better if, from the very beginning, it was clearly indicated how they should work on the VOET and how they should register and evaluate the VOET. This school felt that the government should supply tools to support this from the beginning.
- The second school did not require a great deal of support since work was already being carried out on cultural and global education as part of the school’s education project. The school also felt that schools should have the pedagogical freedom to determine their own focus.

5. Mainstreaming related issues

If the key competence initiative aims/aimed at mainstreaming, what are/have been the major obstacles encountered to generalise it?

This is not a pilot project: it has been implemented at all schools over the last few years. Therefore there are no mainstreaming related issues.
6. SYSTEMIC ASPECTS

To what extent has the initiative been designed as a systemic one from the starting point, i.e. introducing changes in several areas related to the student curriculum (such as teacher training, assessment, school organisation, etc.)?

**Step-by-step plan at system level**

The developers/inspectors stated that cooperation at system level is not self-evident due to the autonomy of education suppliers, teacher trainer colleges etc.

**Step-by-step plan at school level**

The Education Mirror 2012 showed that more than half of schools reported the existence of a plan for the implementation of the VOET. However, questions regarding how this plan was elaborated (school years, stages, types of education) were barely answered. These questions about a concrete plan were presumably not yet relevant, given that most schools are still in an exploratory phase (school year 2010-2011). However, most schools did indicate the points of particular interest that they are including in their plan. The main points of interest for schools were adapting the current VOET policy to the new VOET and the intention to increase staff support. Some schools aimed to pursue a process-type approach (listing, evaluating, adjusting and executing).

The schools interviewed for this case study did draw up a step-by-step implementation plan, however, these plans were not carried out at two out of the three schools due to lack of time. One school establishes a different priority each year, for example equal educational opportunities, student supervision, VOET, internal quality assurance, language policy, etc. This does not mean that other objectives are not covered, but they are often not recorded.

At one school the step-by-step plan was adhered to more strictly. This was, to a large extent, due to a negative inspection report and we observed that the VOET again faded into the background after the school received a positive evaluation.

- During the 2007-2008 school year the school received a negative report with regard to its VOET policy.
- Between 2008 and 2010 a step-by-step plan was elaborated together with an educational guidance supervisor, in order to receive a positive report from the inspection in 2010.
  - All teachers were informed about the VOET via the VOET brochure.
  - The VOET coordinator, together with a member of the school administration and a technical coordinator or head of ICT, attended several education workshops on VOET implementation. Teachers were informed about what they had learnt through staff meetings.
  - A document on school’s VOET vision was produced, explaining what the VOET meant to the school.
  - The VOET were discussed as an agenda item at every staff meeting. The content of this agenda item was prepared together with the educational guidance supervisor.
  - A special staff meeting was held about the VOET. This meeting was prepared together with the educational guidance supervisor.
  - One study group was set up for every stage to look at the issue of how to work on the VOET at that stage.
  - New teachers were always informed about how to work with the VOET.
• Parents were informed by letter about every extracurricular activity. This included an explanation of why the school was organising this activity and how it was linked to the VOET. These activities were also listed in the students’ school agenda, on the website and in the school magazine.

• In 2010 a new registration system for the VOET@2010 was introduced and a related pedagogical workshop was organised for all teachers.

• Every teacher was required to write their own curricular aims in relation to the activities to be carried out, the final attainment levels and the VOET that need to be worked on in his/her yearly plan.

• As of 2011 the VOET once again faded into the background as the school had a different priority (improving equal opportunities for education).

• From 2011, work was carried out on the VOET through activities but this is a continuation of the school’s policy between 2008 and 2010. The number of meetings specifically about the VOET and the registration of objectives decreased.

• In 2012-2013 the school drafted another education project, from which the achievement of the VOET cannot be seen as separate.

• As of the 2013-2014 school year, the school will once again start working with an electronic registration system for the VOET@2010.

What have been the enablers encountered during the implementation because of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

The school that executed the step-by-step plan indicated the support of the PBD as an enabling factor.

What have been the obstacles and/or challenges encountered during the implementation because of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

At the school that executed the step-by-step plan, the original 2008-2010 plan was not thoroughly acted upon due to different priorities.

At the other schools the plans were not carried out due to lack of time and other priorities. One school indicated that it is not realistic to be intensively involved in this process.

How have the obstacles and/or challenges encountered been overcome?

The obstacles, namely different priorities and lack of time, are of a structural nature and have therefore not been overcome.

Have some parts of the original design of the initiative [from the systemic point of view] been abandoned and why?

The school in which the step-by-step plan was executed will work with a new registration system from 2013-2014 onwards. In the event of any changes at the school, these will always be discussed during staff meetings.
If no systemic approach was thought of from the beginning, or if some components had to be abandoned during the implementation, would a step-by-step (or area by area) implementation be advisable, i.e. starting with introducing changes supporting key competences in one area and then introducing related changes in the other areas, and why?

The developers/inspectors indicated that at a system level a step-by-step plan would be beneficial but that the autonomy/freedom of education in Flanders hinders this.

7. EVALUATION RELATED ISSUES

In case a simultaneous/real time evaluation process has been part of the initiative:

An evaluation is possible at various levels: when a VOET activity is carried out, when students achieve the VOET and when the VOET are executed at a school level.

VOET activity

At the three schools every project is evaluated to some degree, the approach taken by each school is discussed below.

- After every activity a short, fairly general, evaluation is carried out, aimed at judging whether the activity was a success or not, e.g. number of students attending and their positive or negative participation.
- In the second school every project is evaluated through the quality assurance document from the PBD.

- In the last school every project is evaluated via the electronic platform smartschool in the ‘evaluation’ section. However, interpretation of this system differs from teacher to teacher and some teachers establish evaluation criteria for projects in advance, while others do not.

Achieving VOET

Two schools stated that the VOET are not evaluated, although one school indicated that the VOET in the own curricula are automatically evaluated. In this school the attitudes of the students are also discussed in the council of teachers and headmaster. The other VOET (that are not part of the ‘own curricula’ nor attitudes) are not evaluated.

At the third school the VOET are evaluated to a limited extent.

- During the first level (12-14 years) one low-achieving class carried out a self-evaluation during the school year 2011-2012 in which the students indicated which VOET they had or had not fully covered. The results of this self-evaluation also appeared on the students’ report cards. This self-evaluation has not been carried out this year but the school administration is considering re-introducing it. The school also evaluated the VOET ‘learning to learn’ during exams, when students had to answer questions such as ‘how did you prepare your exam?’

During a survey\(^9\), the skills of obtaining and processing information were tested. A section of the VOET, learning to learn, was tested by the government.

\(^9\) This survey is a large-scale examination among a representative sample of schools and students that looks at a specific aspect of Flemish education. Assessments investigate to what extent students have achieved certain final attainment levels or developmental objectives.
Execution of the VOET at school level

The Education Mirror 2012 stated that just under half of schools had written an evaluation of the old VOET practice in 2010-2011. This evaluation mainly focused on learning to learn, ICT, trunk and context, and to a much lesser degree on integration and coherence and technical-technological education. About two-thirds of the schools that wrote an evaluation did so for almost all the VOET, while other schools carried out a partial evaluation. Four schools had already adjusted their VOET approach as a result of the evaluation.

The schools interviewed for this case study did not evaluate the implementation of the VOET at school level. At one school the VOET coordinator verifies whether work is being done on all VOET or not (registration). At the same school the inspectorate evaluated the implementation of the first generation VOET. The inspectorate has not yet evaluated the VOET@2010. During an investigation the school must demonstrate that they are working on the cross-curricular final attainment levels through their own plans. This effort should be in proportion to the total amount of time that students spend in secondary education but it is not possible or advisable to use strict quantitative criteria for this. As mentioned previously the inspectorate is currently developing an inspection tool for the VOET. During an investigation of the VOET the inspectorate always writes an inspection report that is available to the general public.

What have been the obstacles to implement it, and why?

VOET activity

One school said that teachers handled the evaluation of projects differently, e.g. not everyone works with evaluation criteria.

Achieving VOET

The developers/inspectors said that a school should pay attention to what it does with regard to the VOET, warning that their work must be effective. However, there is no obligation for the schools to perform to a certain standard (and no obligation to produce a certain result); it is therefore only possible to evaluate the effort and not the result. The developers/inspectors indicated that there is no obligation for schools to evaluate the VOET among their students, but that they can of course evaluate the VOET if they want to.

The schools indicated that it is not always simple to evaluate the VOET. One school stated that the reason they do not evaluate the VOET is that currently there are no proper tools and teachers do not have time because they are required to teach a great many different classes.

The school that evaluated the VOET ‘learning to learn’ during the exam did so at every exam, which meant that after a while the students found the questions repetitious.

Execution of the VOET at school level

One school indicated that an evaluation of VOET policy might be useful but that a proper tool is indispensable. When lacking a proper tool, evaluating can become mere registering and is often done subjectively.

The inspectorate is currently working on an evaluation tool for VOET policy in schools. One school indicated that this should have been developed much earlier. The inspectorate indicated that the development has been postponed due to different priorities.
8. ACHIEVEMENT OF INITIATIVES AIM

Some goals of the new VOET@2010 that are mentioned by educational stakeholders also apply to the previous generation cross-curricular final attainment levels. In reference to each goal the participants that felt that the goal had or had not been achieved are stated in parentheses.

Guaranteeing a complete education (all schools + developers/inspectors): the VOET ensure that schools offer a full education to their students, also called a broad basic education in which students ‘learn for life’. The VOET list the socially required content that ensure that students will have necessary skills required throughout their life.

- According to all schools the VOET contribute to the full education of the students, but the following elements can hinder their achievement (each item mentioned by at least one school):
  - The VOET include an obligation to make reasonable efforts and not an obligation to produce a certain result. This approach is supported by the idea that it is anyway not possible to achieve all VOET; some are developed throughout our lives.
  - Sometimes the application of the objectives is difficult as students have different convictions, e.g. with regard to sexual orientation. A school can steer students towards the goals, but cannot achieve all goals.
  - The VOET are an additional task on top of everything else that needs to be done. It would be better if the VOET formed an entirety together with all the other content. It is possible to overlook matters due to an overload of information.

- The developers/inspectors mentioned the following obstacle: achievement of the VOET is dependent on the school and their method of working.

Safeguarding the school’s capacities (developers/inspectors): the VOET are a kind of social contract. It clarifies the duties of the school regarding the general education of students.

- The developers/inspectors found that the VOET safeguard the schools’ capacities.

Team encouragement (1 school): teachers work on the VOET together.

- Teachers must work on the VOET within a team, which strengthens the school team as a whole.

Promoting the capacity to execute policy (1 school): schools have a great deal of freedom regarding the implementation of the VOET; this can only succeed if there is a strong policy.

- One school stated that the capacity to execute policy concerning the VOET is dependent on the choices made by the school administration. Do they pay enough attention or do they have different priorities?
- One school without a VOET coordinator said that the importance given to the VOET can also differ depending on whether or not a VOET coordinator is assigned to the school. Schools with a VOET coordinator are more likely to fully apply the VOET.

Cross-curricular working (2 schools): the gap between subjects is bridged.
• According to two schools this is achieved with the help of the VOET. Teachers are also learning to look beyond their own field.

Equality between schools (developers/inspectors): before the implementation of the first generation of the VOET some schools already worked with cross-curricular projects and others did not. As a result some students were offered more content than others.

• The developers/inspectors said that schools are now more equal with respect to the VOET.

Equal opportunities (developers/inspectors): both students that are not provided with certain content at home as well as students who are less able to obtain this content on their own have more equal opportunities thanks to the VOET.

• This is achieved with the VOET according to the developers/inspectors.

Reminder (1 school): a way for teachers to take the complete education of the student into consideration and not only subject-related issues.

• The school indicated that it depends strongly on the colleagues’ interests, that it is very personal, with some teachers paying pay more attention to the full education of students than others.

The education stakeholders also mention some goals that are specific to the renewed VOET:

Feasibility (2 schools): Making the total package feasible for schools and teachers.

• One school indicated that there is insufficient time to do much on top of the curricula. Complementary hours could provide a solution (the school could decide how and when to assign these complementary hours). In this way, more time could be spent teaching internet and social media skills, which are of great importance today.

Reduction of the number of goals (2 schools):

• The previous generation VOET was indeed reduced.

• One school indicated that there were still too many goals. Certain goals could be combined.

Updating and renewing the first generation VOET (1 school): a number of goals were outdated or no longer sufficiently valid. Sometimes content, skills and attitudes that are considered important were missing.

• One school said that there does not appear to be great difference in focus compared to the first generation VOET.

• In the VOET@2010 brochure, we read that the most striking new focus areas with regard to content are: remembrance education, media comprehension, basic insights into socio-economy, entrepreneurship, Europe, justice, cultural education and sustainable development.

More freedom for schools (1 school): for example, goals are no longer determined per stage (except ICT, learning to learn and technical-technological education).

• This is achieved with the help of the VOET.

More competency-based phrasing (1 school).

• According to one school this has not led to any great change in real terms.

Clarification (2 schools): clarifying the first generation
VOET, which, according to the respondents in the study\textsuperscript{10}, are phrased in a difficult, vague or complicated manner.

- One school stated that they did not feel that the VOET@2010 clarify the first generation VOET. The coherence between the VOET and the entire curriculum is unclear.

- Another school stated that the VOET@2010 are clearer.

9. NEXT STEPS

What is planned next for the initiative?

One school will start to use a new electronic registration system for the VOET@2010 next year. The same school is looking forward to the work by their PBD, which will verify which VOET can already be achieved by the curriculum.

Another school will next year use the PBD’s quality check to verify their situation in terms of their VOET policy, looking at whether any gaps exist and how they can be filled. At that time it will also be possible to discuss to what extent the VOET can be integrated into subjects.

The administration of the third school will review where gaps exist and draw up a review of their current VOET policy. The head teacher indicated that it would be better if this was carried out by a VOET coordinator but that this is not possible due to a lack of money. She also stated that it would be even better if the teachers themselves were involved in this but that it would involve too much pressure in terms of planning. The school is planning to carry out another self-evaluation in the see section 8: Evaluation related issues - Achieving VOET).

The inspectorate is currently discussing the methodology of their investigation tool. The inspectorate also stated that much depends on political commitment to the VOET. A new government (following the May 2014 elections) may not find the VOET important and it is also possible that a decision will be made to allot the individual VOET to specific subjects.

Should the approach to the VOET continue to be based on an obligation to make reasonable effort or would a commitment to results be more appropriate?

This question was posed once again by the interviewer because this was a topic that is frequently raised during discussions about education.

Both the obligation to make reasonable effort and the commitment to results have positive and negative aspects according to education stakeholders.

Obligation to make reasonable effort – negative

Two schools and the developers/inspectors indicated that the obligation to make reasonable effort may lead to less attention being paid to the VOET.

Obligation to make reasonable effort – positive

Developers/inspectors: Schools have no obligation to evaluate the VOET and this is a good thing because there is insufficient evaluation expertise.

Commitment to results - negative

Developers/inspectors: This would reduce the VOET to merely measurable goals. Furthermore, teachers would have to evaluate the achievement of these goals even though they lack the evaluation expertise.

One school stated that evaluating the VOET would not be simple. Another school said that if there was a commitment to results, the PBD should offer refresher courses on the VOET. According to this school the commitment to results would not make any difference to school policy but it would increase the pressure on the school.

Commitment to results – positive

Developers/inspectors: The advantage would be that the work on the VOET would also be carried out more effectively; something that is currently not considered a priority. One school indicated that teachers would handle the VOET more consciously if they were to be evaluated. Students also find subjects for which they receive points more valuable.

Other comments from the school and inspectorate staff interviewed

One school gave the message ‘Keep it simple’; i.e. phrase the VOET as simply as possible. The school finds that there has been a great improvement in the current VOET compared to the previous version.

The second school stated that the government should not forget that schools have little space and little free time. They also wanted to provide the government with a sense of reality. The government may be idealistic and ask for the VOET to be integrated in the daily class routine but certain teachers will be more attuned to this than others, it is very personal topic. Finally, the school stated that it would be beneficial if the PBD were to offer refresher courses on the evaluation of the VOET and on the integration of the VOET into projects. Teachers need to feel enthusiastic if they are to participate in these courses as they still tend to prefer subject-oriented refresher courses.

The third school also phrased a few wishes to the government:

- A shorter list of VOET
- No obligation for results
- When the government phrases new goals they must be fully elaborated, e.g. also including tools for registration and evaluation.

The interviewee also offered her thanks to the PBD.

The developers/inspectors found that the development of the VOET has led to an essential development in education, namely working with a cross-curricular approach.

Appendixes to be found at:
http://keyconet.eun.org/project-results/case-studies

Appendix 1: English translation of the VOET@2010

Appendix 2: English translation of the basic principles of the VOET
FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR NETWORK’S PARTNERS:

MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION / NATIONAL AGENCIES

http://www.bmukk.gov.at
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/wegwijs/AKOV/
http://www.education.gouv.fr/

http://www.juntaeandalucia.es/
http://www.ncca.ie/
http://www.eitsa.ee/en/

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES

http://ife.ens-lyon.fr/ife
http://www.eiesp.org
http://www.uned.es

http://www.ie.uminho.pt/
http://www.ie.ul.pt
http://www.jyu.fi/en/

http://www.cicero.fi

PRACTICE-RELATED PARTNERS

http://www.ja-ge.eu
http://www.rektorsakademien.se
European Schoolnet is the coordinator of the KeyCoNet Project.

European Schoolnet is the network of 30 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to our key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners.

Since its founding in 1997, European Schoolnet has used its links with education ministries to help schools make effective use of educational technologies, equipping both teachers and pupils with the skills to achieve in the knowledge society.

In particular, European Schoolnet pledges to:

- Support schools in achieving effective use of ICT in teaching and learning
- Improve and raise the quality of education in Europe
- Promote the European dimension in education

The KeyCoNet project has been funded with support from the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. Responsibility for this publication lies solely with the author, and the Commission is not responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.