COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FLANDERS 2014

KEYCONET
Key Competence Network on School Education

European Schoolnet
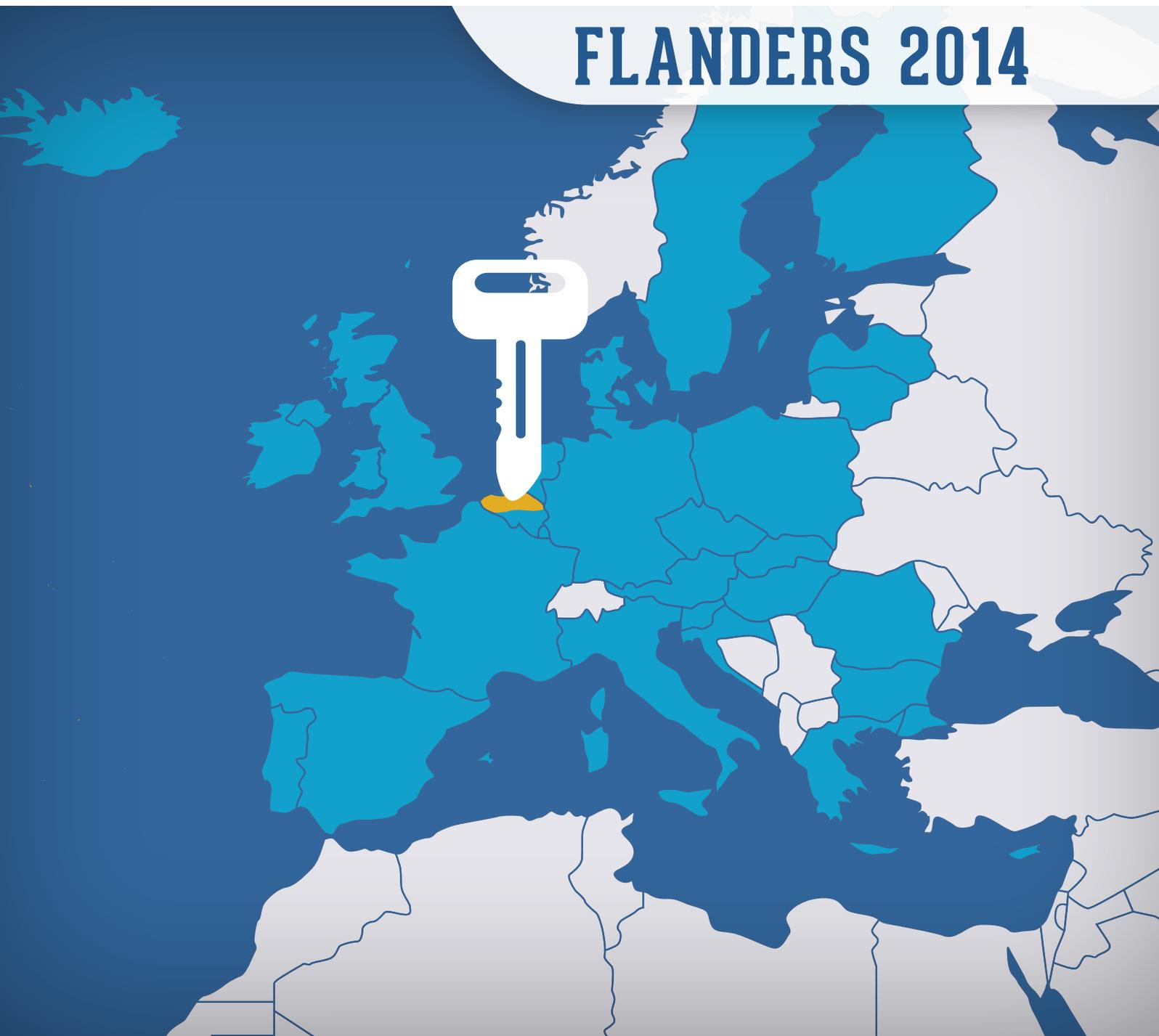
SHORT SUMMARY
Providing a national description contextualizing key competence development in your country [rationale, objectives etc.]:

In Flanders, the European recommendation on key competences is used as a reference framework for revising existing and developing new objectives through introducing educational reforms. All key competences are addressed. The approach to key competences in Flanders is a targeted one, in which the government focuses on setting the curriculum standards and in which schools focus on assessment, teaching methods, etc. Reforms can be implemented top-down as well as bottom-up.

The fragmented landscape of the Flemish education system, which includes many different stakeholders, can at times be an obstacle to reform and at times an enabler.

KCD INITIATIVES:

What relevant key competence related initiatives (e.g. curricular reform/national strategy/pilot project/public consultation etc. in relation to students' curricula and assessment, teacher training, school organisation, and learning resources) have taken place in your country over the past five years, and which are planned in the future? You may also refer here to the 2012 case notes produced for your country, and any other initiatives which will be the focus of the 2013 case notes.

Government – curricula

- Since 1 September 2010, every Flemish secondary school is required to implement the cross-curricular final objectives. These objectives concern physical health and safety, mental health/wellbeing, socio-relational development, the environment and sustainable development, political-legal society, socio-economic society, socio-cultural society, learning to learn, ICT and technical-technological education. The objectives address almost all key competences to some degree.

- Key competences were also used as a reference framework for the development of several other objectives:

  - Strongly inspired by the European recommendation on key competences, science objectives underwent a thorough review.

    - In 2010: first stage of secondary education.

    - In 2012: The science objectives for the second stage of general education and the second/third stage of vocational education were approved in 2012.

    - The science objectives for the third stage of general education and the second/third stage of technical and art education are in the legislative process now.

- The final objectives for Geography for the third stage of technical and art education have been revised (pursuing a broad scientific literacy, targeted selection of concepts aiming at a good connection with the wide range of fields of study, competence-based in alignment with the recent cross-curricular attainment targets). The new objectives are in the legislative process now.

- An 'additional general training curriculum' was implemented in Secondary Adult Education in 2012. Additional general training is a core curriculum in the areas of personal development, social participation and lifelong learning. It also takes into account new insights and developments in society. One example is the greater impact of IT.

- 'Digital Competences' were used as a reference source for the revision of objectives for ICT in adult basic education. These objectives were implemented in 2012.

- The reference framework for visual literacy (2013) refers back to the European key competences and shows that aspects of visual literacy are part of all 8 key competences.

The European recommendation on key competences will, as far as possible, be used as a reference framework for revising existing and developing new - final objectives in the future.

- The evolution towards competence-based education in the implementation of the Flemish Qualifications Structure, as well as the need for more coherent and systematic final objectives, led to the development of the 'format for competence-based formulation of final objectives'. This format can be used for formulating final objectives in pre-school education, primary and secondary education (general as well as special education), adult education and part-time education in the arts. The format is currently in the public consultation phase and has not yet been implemented.

- In June 2013 the Flemish Government approved a 'master plan' about the reform of secondary education. This master plan contains an analysis of strengths/weaknesses, goals for the reform and actions to take.

- The newly formed government of Flanders has set out its plans for the coming five years (The Flemish Government's coalition agreement 2014-2019). In the coming months, these plans will be further developed in policy documents. The Minister wants to evaluate, adjust and reduce the current objectives when necessary. First, there is a need for a more systematic and coherent way to describe objectives on all educational levels. They should be formulated in a clear and ambitious way in order to meet the needs of the 21st century. This will happen in dialogue with education providers and partners, higher education institutions, labour market, civil society organizations and the Government. Schools will get all necessary freedom to implement these goals considering their own didactic and pedagogic principles.

Assessment, teacher training

In the Flemish education system, schools are free to determine their own teaching and assessment methods. Nevertheless, in certain schools there has been a change in the way students are assessed:

· The OECD country report from the Flemish Community of Belgium illustrates the shift of emphasis in assessment towards a 'broad assessment culture'. This relates to the implementation of 'active learning methods'. Students are no longer perceived as passive subjects, but are involved in the assessment of their own performances and progress and even in that of their classmates.

· This report also shows how assessment competences are integrated in teacher education and professional development.

· In 2014-2015, the Ministry of Education will put the theme 'broad assessment of languages (Dutch)' on the professional development agenda.

OVERALL KCD APPROACH:

How would you characterise the overall approach to key competence development in your country? Is it a holistic approach characterised by an overarching strategy, or rather a targeted approach focusing on one or more specific dimension of the education system (student curriculum, assessment, teacher training, school organisation, learning resources etc.)? Does it cover formal and non-formal learning, both primary and secondary school levels?

The approach to key competences in Belgium is a targeted one. The policy is mostly focused on the student curriculum (top-down). As already noted, the European recommendation on key competences is used as a reference framework for revising existing and developing new objectives. Changing objectives can of course have consequences for assessment, teacher training, school organisation and learning resources.

In Flanders, schools have a lot of autonomy (bottom-up). They are free to determine their own way of implementing the objectives, their own assessment methods, school organisation, etc.

Until now the main focus has been on formal learning at secondary school level.

KEY COMPETENCES ADDRESSED:

Is there a focus on any particular EU key competence/s or a combination of them, or perhaps there is more of a focus on alternative/complementary competences defined at national level?

In the Flemish education system, all key competences are addressed. The cross-curricular final objectives address almost all key competences at some level, involving a combination

of key competences. In other areas, there is a focus on a particular key competence, e.g. the 'Digital Competences' are used as a reference source for revising the objectives of ICT in Adult basic education.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED:

Who are the main stakeholders involved in key competence development in your country?

The following stakeholders are involved in the reform:

· AKOV: The Quality Assurance Agency for Education and Training, which develops new and revises existing final objectives, by means of 'final objectives development committees'

· All educational networks (Go! Education of the Flemish Community; OGO - publicly funded, publicly run education, and; VGO - publicly funded privately run schools) and their educational guidance services are members of the 'final objectives development committees'.

· Scientists and teacher trainers specialised in certain competences are sometimes involved in the 'final objectives development committees'.

KCD IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES:

How does the implementation of key competence development/reform in school education function in your country? *(e.g. process followed, political commitment, consultation with stakeholders and their respective roles, incentives for stakeholders, dedicated funding, teaching material, definition of goals and standards, assessment and evaluation mechanisms, impact on teacher training/professional development and school practices/leadership, scaling-up approach, based on research/ evidence? etc.)*

Top-down:

Minister asks AKOV (see above) for final objectives (key competences) to be developed or renewed → AKOV begins the preparation of key competence development (study phase, bilateral contacts with stakeholders, selection of development committee members, draft of final objectives) → Final objectives development by the development committees led by AKOV → AKOV sends proposal of final objectives to the Minister of Education □ Minister sends final proposal to the Flemish Board of Education → Flemish Board of Education gives advice to Minister → Minister sends the advice and final proposal to the Flemish Government for decision (or asks AKOV to make changes to the proposal and then sends the altered proposal to the Flemish government) → The decision of the Flemish Government is endorsed by Parliamentary Decree → Legal implementation of reform → Communication of the new final objectives to teachers, educational guidance services, etc. → Educational guidance services/ teacher training/post formation services educate (future) teachers □ Gradual implementation in schools → Teachers → Pupils → … + INTERACTON

Bottom-up:

As already mentioned, Flemish schools have a lot of autonomy. They are free to determine their own way of implementing the final objectives, their own assessment methods, school organisation, etc. Moreover, the schools can add their own objectives to the state final objectives. The goals of educational networks (Go! Education of the Flemish Community; OGO - publicly funded, publicly run education, and; VGO - publicly funded privately run schools) can also be competence-based.

OBSTACLES AND FACILITATORS:

What would you identify as obstacles and/or facilitators to developing and implementing a key competence approach in your country's education system, or to more generally introducing any type of educational reform related to the definition of key competences and revision of the curriculum, and to joint collaboration on such issues relying on the input from those working on different dimensions (e.g. teacher training, learning resources etc.)?

The Flemish educational landscape is fragmented. In other words, there are several actors in the educational field with different stakes and different objectives. The government is responsible for formulating the final objectives, while schools are responsible for implementing these objectives (and their own additional objectives if they think that they are necessary) using their own assessment and teaching methods, etc.

Moreover Flanders has different educational networks: (Go! Education of the Flemish Community; OGO - publicly funded, publicly run education, and; VGO - publicly funded privately run schools). This fragmented landscape can both be an obstacle and a facilitator to developing and implementing a key competence approach.

Facilitator:

· In Flandres there is agreement at system level concerning the need to reconsider the basic competences.

· Competition between schools can encourage reform.

· Bottom-up: schools/educational networks introduce their own reform.

· There should always be a serious debate to create support for all educational stakeholders.

· Agreement of Flemish Board of education: all educational stakeholders are gathered under the Flemish Board of Education. Acceptance of reform by the Board facilitates its implementation.

Obstacle:

· Competence-based education is seen as a teaching method by educational networks. As such, the government is not able to introduce this reform, according to the educational networks. However, the government does not think of competence-based education as a teaching method. More precisely, the government thinks it has the right to formulate competence-based final objectives for Flemish education but the educational networks are opposed to this idea (even though some of their schools already work in a competence-based way).

· Different ways of implementation: if the government revises the curriculum, schools can implement this in a different way (with different teaching or assessment methods).

· Different curricula: schools/educational networks can adapt and/or further define the minimum objectives of the government, which can result in different curricula.

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