Commissie van Wijzen

PRIORITY FOR PROFESSIONALISM

Contemporary personnel policy with competent teachers, powerful schools and strong school boards.

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Introduction

As in other countries, Flemish education is confronted with a serious teacher shortage. The consequences of this shortage are dramatic for students, schools, parents and society at large. Pupils are denied the right to education. The policy has made commendable attempts to combat the teacher shortage with short-term punctual measures. However, the Flemish Government is also aware that a more fundamental approach, aimed at the medium and long term, is required. In itself, the teacher shortage is serious enough, but it is not an isolated problem. The teacher shortage is rather a symptom of a long-dormant problem characterized by an erosion of the attractiveness of and appreciation for the teaching profession. For some time now, there has been an awareness that it is necessary to make fundamental changes in teacher careers in order to solve the teacher problem and therefore also the teacher shortage. However, during successive legislatures, policy makers and social partners have failed to develop a coherent framework on teacher careers, sometimes referred to as the 'teachers' pact', and to reach an agreement on it in the social dialogue. The problem is also not so straightforward and affects many dimensions of the organisation of education.

For this reason, the Flemish Government, at the suggestion of the Minister of Education Ben Weyts, has taken the initiative to set up an expert committee with the task of developing a vision on the teaching profession and the school organisation on the basis of scientific expertise and practical knowledge, in order to arrive at a "blueprint for a modern personnel, human resources, professionalisation and school organisation policy".

You have before you the report of this Committee. It contains an in-depth analysis of the state of the teaching profession in the Flemish Community, of the school leader and of school boards, and of the changing nature of the teacher's professionalism. On the basis of a number of principles, a series of guidelines are then developed for a contemporary teacher and school organisation policy. Subsequently, proposals and recommendations are elaborated on the continuum of professionalisation of teachers, on the school organisation and educational policy.

The key words of this report are professionalism and school autonomy. The basic premise of the Committee is that the teacher problem, and therefore also the teacher shortage, can only be solved sustainably if professionalism is put at the centre and a perspective is developed on the continuous professionalisation of the teacher and the school leader. There is no other way. The teacher shortage will not be solved by simple solutions that only consist of increasing the competitiveness in the tight labour market, although measures are of course also needed in that area. Nor is it about making the profession easier or more comfortable. The teaching profession is, as is often rightly said, one of the most beautiful professions in the world, but it is also an extremely difficult profession. Only by truly recognizing the professionalism of the teacher, which is at the heart of the teaching profession, will it be possible to improve the attractiveness and appreciation of the profession in a durable way. By setting high expectations for teachers, we ask them to take responsibility and be involved. At the same time, this ensures that the teaching profession is more highly valued in society.

All this also demands a lot from the school organisation. Schools, their management and boards must be able and willing to pursue a contemporary personnel policy that not only ensures workable work, but also creates a stimulating school climate and a motivating environment in which teachers can develop themselves to their fullest professionality. The teacher is not on his own. He or she is part of a team and of an organisation, i.e. the school. That is why we speak of connected teaching. School organisation also requires contemporary leadership, hence the

emphasis we place on the importance of school leaders. And schools also need strong boards. School boards are a somewhat forgotten but very important component of powerful schools.

The proposals and recommendations made by the Committee in this report are fully in line with this vision. They often deviate significantly from what is true in education today. The regulations, especially the legal status regulation and the regulatory framework for schools, do not currently work in favour of the professionalism of teachers and the autonomy of schools and therefore need a thorough refresh. This is mainly because these regulations date from a very different period, when there was more of a teacher surplus and a risk of unemployment. This refresh should allow schools, as is the case for organisations in other sectors, to pursue a contemporary HR and personnel policy. It should also offer a dynamic perspective on the teaching career, on professional growth and development.

The Committee is not preaching revolution. Education is a complex system that requires a prudent and sustainable reform strategy, rather than spectacular interventions that mainly serve political and communicative purposes. The Committee has been looking for realistic, workable proposals rather than abstract wishful thinking. The Committee is aware that some of the proposals required courage from the actors and partners in the field of education. The partners in the field of education are asked to be willing to step over their own shadow of the narrow defence of interests and to draw up a perspective on an attractive and contemporary teaching profession together. With sufficient will on the part of all actors, the proposals and recommendations can be implemented in the medium term. For some proposals, additional research is required before successful implementation can be carried out.

The Committee's proposals are also closely linked, balanced and mutually reinforcing. It would be very unwise to cherry-pick, to implement only the low-hanging fruit and to leave the more difficult proposals on the table. Partial implementation of the proposals and recommendations will not only not achieve the intended effect but will often also be detrimental to the educational field.

But doing nothing is not an option either. As has already been said, the current problematic situation is also due to the fact that for many years and several legislatures no fundamental decisions have been taken with regard to the teaching career and the teaching statute. The teacher shortage that Flemish education is currently facing is also partly the result of the slow erosion of the attractiveness of the teaching profession due to the lack of a contemporary perspective on professionalisation and good personnel policy in schools.

The proposals and recommendations presented by the Committee in this report by no means come out of the blue. The Committee has taken great care to substantiate its proposals with empirical research evidence. To a very large extent, domestic and foreign research has upon in the formulation of the proposals and recommendations. The extensive annotation leads the interested reader to the relevant literature.

Education is a complex structure. The Committee has not been able to look at all special sectors and situations in education within the proposed timing. She has mainly focused on mainstream primary and secondary education and has only been able to devote limited attention to special needs education, part-time art education or adult education. Despite the many differences, there are also major similarities in the career and the legal status regulation. It seemed to the Committee to be a good option to first outline the perspective for the teacher and the school in mainstream education. Afterwards, this perspective will have to be modelled on the specific needs of these other types of education.

Nor has the Committee been able to examine all the proposals and recommendations in full technicality. It was essential to develop a coherent vision within the time frame allotted to it and to formulate the corresponding proposals and recommendations.

All the proposed measures are not only there to deal with the teacher problem, but above all to safeguard the quality of education and thus serve the interests of pupils and of the Flemish society. Pupils have the right to high quality education. Flemish society desperately needs to enhance the quality of its education in order to guarantee its prosperity and the quality of its model of society in the longer term. A society cannot unpunished allow the education system to collapse. And the quality of education depends first and foremost on the quality of its teachers and its schools.

Chapter 1: Assignment, composition and working method

Committee

On the recommendation of the Flemish Minister of Education, Sport, Animal Welfare and the Flemish Periphery, Mr. Ben Weyts, the Flemish Government on 2 December 2022 appointed an expert committee with the name "Commissie van Wijzen". Under the heading *The Teacher of Tomorrow*, the Committee received the task to"*... starting from an analysis of the initial situation, to write a blueprint for a modern personnel, human resources, professionalisation and school organisation policy within education, integrating opportunities deriving from digitisation and dual learning."* The Committee was given one year, and the report was expected by the end of 2023.

It goes without saying that the Flemish Government's initiative must be seen against the background of the widening teacher shortage, but it also results from a more fundamental concern for the attractiveness of the teaching profession and career and an important concern about the quality of education.

The Committee has been given complete freedom to reflect on the challenges of the teaching profession and to develop a vision and is very grateful to the Flemish Government and the Minister of Education for this. This vision is aimed at the medium and long term and the implementation of the Committee's proposals and recommendations will span several legislatures. Education needs a long-term perspective.

The Committee has taken up its task with the awareness that the teacher shortage is not only a major problem, but also an opportunity to think about personnel policy in a new way. After all, the existing regulations in education were designed in a completely different context when there was a teacher surplus and the threat of unemployment rather than a shortage in the teacher labour market. The Committee strongly believes that, if we want to take steps towards a revaluation of the teaching profession in order to improve the quality of education, it will be necessary to think beyond the current statutes and legal status regulations and to formulate a vision for the medium and long term. It is this challenge that the Committee has taken on.

Composition of the Committee

The Flemish Government appointed Mr. Dirk Van Damme as Chairman of the Committee and Mr. Paul Yperman as Vice-Chairman. Mrs. Hilde Lesage was appointed secretary. Together they form the Bureau of the Committee.

The Bureau was instructed to come up with its own proposal for composition. The Bureau searched for a balance in composition of the Committee between experts on the one hand and people from the field of education on the other. The first group includes not only academic education experts, but also people with expertise in education law, labour market policy, personnel policy and human resources, as well as people with extensive experience in social dialogue in education. In the second group, a balance was sought between school leaders on the one hand and active teachers on the other. For the latter group, the teachers' panel of the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) was approached. A conscious effort was also made to ensure the presence of people with experience in innovative forms of school organisation and teacher policy. Finally, a limited overlap with the composition of the Better Education Committee was sought.

After deliberation, the Committee's Bureau drew up a list of 20 persons, which was subsequently approved by the Flemish Government.

The full composition of the Committee with brief biographical information on each member is given in Appendix 1. List of members of the Committee .

Objectives

In line with the mission of the Flemish Government, the Committee has set itself the goal of developing a coherent and integrated long-term vision of the teaching profession and the teaching career, aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the profession, at retaining and motivating teachers in education through a contemporary personnel and school policy, at a high-performance school organisation and at stimulating professional growth and support.

In this objective, the design of a future-proof professional career model for the teacher and a vision of the school as a professional organisation are two sides of the same coin.

From the outset, the Committee has defined the professionalism of the teacher as a key concept and placed it in a dynamic perspective. In the Committee's view, the teacher's career is a process of continuous professional development and growth, which also leads to increased job satisfaction and well-being. It is the professionalism of the teacher that is the most important determinant for the quality of education.

This professionalism of the teacher can only develop in a professional school organisation, with strong leadership, with cooperation in multidisciplinary teams, with a motivating personnel policy and connections with many other social institutions and partners. A strong school, with a high degree of autonomy and administrative capacity, is also an important prerequisite for the quality of education.

Secondly, the Committee also looked at a series of other aspects of Flemish education, which must be addressed in order to give the teacher and the school what they are entitled to. The funding of schools and the rationalisation of the educational offer, with the dimension of free choice typical of our country, are also discussed. A more efficient and effective use of resources in education should create more room for the professional teacher and the autonomous school to flourish.

In carrying out its mandate, the Committee has chosen not to examine certain relevant aspects in depth. The organisation of the school year and the problems related to the current holiday scheme have not been dealt with; nor did the Committee go into the topic of the 'open school' or the cooperation of schools with relevant actors in the local community, the cooperation with the labour market actors, the local socio-economic ecosystem or the infrastructure problems.

Approach

The Committee has had to make a number of choices in the development of its mandate. She has concentrated on mainstream primary and secondary education. Quantitatively, the largest group of teachers can be found there. She has not had the time to focus on the specific needs of adult education, education for special needs students, and part-time art education. However, the differences should not be exaggerated; there are great similarities between these types of education.

While more money for education would be welcomed by many in the field, the Committee has aimed for a budgetary neutrality of its proposals. There are many social challenges facing the Flemish Government and education is fairly well funded in Flanders. There are proposals from the Committee that cost money, but the Committee also advocates greater efficiency and effectiveness, and has a number of proposals to that effect.

Work

The Committee's work was carried out in three phases.

The first phase was that of exploration and analysis. The objective of this extensive start-up phase was that all members of the Committee would gain a good insight into Flemish and international scientific research with regard to all possible facets related to teaching, teaching careers and leadership in education. To this end, an extensive collection of Flemish and international scientific literature and research was made available to all members of the Committee. In addition, explanations were also given about recently relevant scientific research outcomes by external educational scientists and experts and by researchers who are members of the Committee. An explanation was also given by the chairs of the Better Education Committee and the Committee that drew up a core profile for school leadership in Flemish education.

In order to gain a good insight into the situation and positions within Flemish education, hearings were organised with the social partners and education providers, the political groups in the Education Committee of the Flemish Parliament, with former policy makers and with other stakeholders in education such as pupils, parents and the education inspectorate. This phase is reflected in the first part of the report, which provides a sketch of the situation.

In the second phase, the Committee met on several occasions to develop a vision and to deepen the various themes covered in the report through discussions and exchanges of views, usually on the basis of input from one of the Committee's members.

The final phase was that of the synthesis, decision-making and the writing of the report based on a number of principles and guidelines. Also at this stage, the Committee met several times to refine ideas and ensure the coherence of the whole.

Reading guide

The report is structured as follows. Part I contains a sketch of the current situation of Flemish education, specifically with regard to teachers, school leaders and school boards. In addition to the factual description, it also contains an analysis of the changes and challenges. This section provides the factual basis on which the report builds. In Part II, we set out the principles and guidelines on which the proposals and recommendations are based. This is a fundamental part because it lays the foundation for further work and also gives coherence to the proposals and recommendations.

In Parts III, IV and V we elaborate on our vision for the career development and continuous professionalisation of teachers, the school organisation and the educational policy. In these chapters, the proposals and recommendations are elaborated and substantiated. These proposals and recommendations are placed in a framework.

Finally, Part VI brings together the proposals and recommendations by way of conclusions. A summary table ranks them according to the main lines described above.

In order to illustrate the coherence of the report and to facilitate a non-linear reading, numerous hyperlinks between the various chapters and paragraphs of the report are included in footnotes.

Part I. Sketching the issues at stake

Chapter 2. Teachers and school leaders in Flanders today

This chapter contains a brief analysis of the state of the teaching profession and the profession of school leaders in Flanders today. It provides the data on which the Committee's analysis of the issue at hand is based. We called on *the Environmental Analysis of the Education and Training Policy Area*, which was drawn up and published independently but simultaneously with the work of the Committee by the Department of Education and Training, more specifically the chapters 'Developments in the field of teachers' and 'Developments in the field of school leaders'.[1] The Committee has adapted and supplemented the text of the *Environmental Analysis* on certain points as it sees fit. In addition, we drew on the paper by De Witte and Iterbeke for *Leuven Economic Viewpoints*.[2]

Developments in the field of teachers

Characteristics of the teacher population

Age, gender and place of residence

The Flemish teacher population is relatively young. Partly as a result of the abolition of end-of-career schemes, the group of teachers aged 60 and over is increasing.[3] For example, in 2022, 6.1% of teachers were 60 years or older, compared to 4.3% in 2017.[4] However, the age structure differs considerably from school to school.

Just like their international colleagues, Flemish teachers are predominantly female: 87% of all staff in primary education and 64% in secondary education are women.[5]

Teachers live closer to their workplace than the average employee (37.7% in less than half an hour versus 35.4% on average on the Flemish labour market).[6]

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[1] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2023a). *Omgevingsanalyse van het Beleidsdomein Onderwijs en Vorming*. https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/59107

[2] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022). *Het lerarentekort als katalysator voor onderwijshervormingen.* Technical Report 2022/191, KU Leuven - Faculty of Economics and Business. https://feb.kuleuven.be/research/LESarchief/pdf/LES%202022%20-%20191%20lerarentekort.pdf

[3] Eurydice (2021). Teachers in Europe, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-06/teachers_in_europe_2020_chapter_2_0_0.pdf; Van Droogenbroeck, F., Lemblé, H., Bongaerts, B., Spruyt, B., Siongers, J. & Kavadias, D. (2020a). *TALIS 2018 Vlaanderen - Volume I en II*. Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?id=12038; Van Droogenbroeck, F., Lemblé, H., Bongaerts, B., Spruyt, B., Siongers, J. & Kavadias, D. (2020b). *TALIS 2018 Vlaanderen - Volume II*. Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel http://talis2018.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TALIS-2018-Vlaanderen-Volume-II.pdf

[4] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022a). *Statistisch Jaarboek 2021-2022*, https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/statistisch-jaarboek-van-het-vlaams-onderwijs-2021-2022

[5] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020b).

[6] Bourdeaud'hui, R., Janssens, F., Vanderhaeghe S. (2019). *Werkbaarheidsprofiel onderwijssector 2019.* Sectorale analyse op de Vlaamse werkbaarheidsmonitor 2004 – 2019. https://www.serv.be/sites/default/files/documenten/StIA20200302_WBM2019_Onderwijs_RAP.pdf

Employment

The majority of Flemish teachers work full-time and are employed in one school. Nevertheless, the proportion of part-time teachers is relatively high compared to other countries and sectors. [7] In primary education, there is an increase from 36.2% to 38.5% part-time workers between 2012 and 2022. While part-time work can help to achieve a better work-life balance, this trend does create a need for additional staff. In secondary education – unlike in primary education – we see a limited decrease in the share of part-time teachers: from 36.8% in 2012 to 35.9% in 2022.[8]

The relatively high frequency of part-time work in education is strongly linked to the high number of women in the teaching profession, women's responsibility for caring responsibilities and domestic work, and the pursuit of a better work-life balance. However, part-time work also has significant disadvantages. In the first place, it exacerbates the shortage in the teacher labour market, but there are also disadvantages for the person concerned. People (in this case women) with a part-time job have a weaker economic independence, are more vulnerable in the event of divorce, incapacity for work or death of the partner. Working part-time also limits career advancement opportunities. Specifically for education, it hinders integration into school teams and participation in school-related tasks and activities.

Diversity

The teacher population is not very diverse in terms of country of origin. Although there is an increase in the number of teachers of foreign origin, in 2019 this was only 6.4% in primary and secondary education, in contrast to a growing diversity in the group of pupils.[9] In comparison, 36.8% of the population between the ages of 0 and 17 was of foreign origin in 2019. In Flanders, the low diversity among teachers is influenced by several factors. Social inequality in education means that young people with a migrant background are more often referred to vocational fields.[10] They are already moving on less to higher education and therefore also to teacher training.[11] In addition, there are various thresholds, such as the banning of religious symbols in most schools. Recruitment practices also play a role. Social and cultural perceptions of the teaching profession also have an influence,[12] with negative stereotypes[13] or the lack of representation discouraging people from choosing the profession.[14]

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[7] *Ibid.*; Statbel (2022). *Deeltijds werk*, https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/werk-opleiding/arbeidsmarkt/deeltijds-werk#panel-12

[8] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022a).

[9] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2021). *Nulmeting herkomst leerkrachten in het Vlaamse onderwijs*, https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/nulmeting-herkomst-leerkrachten-in-het-vlaamse-onderwijs

[10] Agirdag, O. (2020). *Onderwijs in een gekleurde samenleving*. EPO.

[11] Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/559.310

[12] Dixon, R.D., Griffin, A.R., & Teoh, M.B. (2019). *If you listen, we will stay: Why teachers of color leave and how to disrupt teacher turnover*, The Education Trust & Teach Plus, Washington DC. https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/If-You-Listen-We-Will-Stay-Why-Teachers-of-Color-Leave-and-How-to-Disrupt-Teacher-Turnover-2019-September.pdf

[13] Pizarro, M., & Kohli, R. (2020). "I Stopped Sleeping": Teachers of Color and the Impact of Racial Battle Fatigue. *Urban Education*, 55(7), 967–991. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918805788

[14] Also so the paragraph on diversity in this report.

Professional competence

Of the tenured teaching staff in Flanders, 95% have a required certificate of competence in primary education, 76% in secondary education (see

Table 1). The percentages for temporary staff are considerably lower: 75% and 50% respectively. The percentages have not fluctuated significantly in recent years.

Level of education	Competence classification	2017-2018		2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021	
		Tenured	Temporarily	Tenured	Temporarily	Tenured	Temporarily	Tenured	Temporarily
Primary education	Necessary	94,78%	79,02%	94,93%	77,31%	94,80%	75,96%	94,57%	74,66%
	Deemed satisfactory	5,21%	14,48%	5,06%	15,27%	5,19%	16,32%	5,42%	50,90%
	Other	0,01%	6,50%	0,01%	7,42%	0,01%	7,72%	24,42%	38,83%
Secondary education	Necessary	76,14%	55,42%	76,10%	53,52%	76,02%	52,49%	75,57%	50,36%
	Deemed satisfactory	23,85%	32,37%	23,89%	32,70%	23,97%	33,86%	24,42%	33,83%
	Other	0,01%	12,21%	0,01%	13,78%	0,01%	13,65%	0,01%	15,81%

Table 1. Evolution of certificates of competence[15]

Remuneration

Flemish teachers have a higher salary than the OECD average (adjusted to purchasing power). At the start of their careers, full-time Flemish teachers in the first stage of higher education oriented secondary education have a salary of 39,000 euros, compared to 34,200 euros for the OECD on average.[16] After a career of 15 years, the same Flemish teachers receive 55,000 euros, compared to 47,000 for the OECD on average. In the second and third grades, starting Flemish teachers receive 48,600 euros, compared to 35,700 euros for the OECD on average. After 15 years, those same teachers will receive 70,700 euros, compared to 48,600 euros. The salary of Flemish teachers therefore evolves from 1.14 times that of their colleagues in the OECD on average for starting teachers in the first grade to 1.45 times for teachers with 15 years of seniority in the second and third grade.

The pay gap between teachers in the second and third stage of secondary education and the first stage of secondary education is considerably larger than the OECD average in Flanders. This is due to different levels of qualification and corresponding salary scales between the first degree on the

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[15] Data from: AGODI (2022). *Jaarverslag 2021.* https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/52379

[16] These and subsequent amounts have been calculated on the basis of OECD (2023a). *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en. Tabel D3.1. These are gross annualised amounts for the year 2022 without social security and pension contributions paid by the employer. The amounts are adjusted for purchasing power parity ("purchase power parity for private consumption") to enable international comparison and were converted from USD back to EUR at an exchange rate of 1 USD = 0.91 EUR. Comparisons for practical teachers in vocational finality are not possible because many countries cannot report data for this. See *ibid.,* Tabel D3.2.

one hand and the second and third degree on the other. The impact of seniority is also greater in Flanders than the OECD average.

Compared to other jobs for equally qualified people, the remuneration of teachers in Flanders is decent. In 2022, the wage tension between the average wages of teachers and other tertiary-educated workers was 0.87 for bachelor's degrees holders in primary education and the first and second stage of secondary education and 1.04 for master's degrees holders in the second and third stage of secondary education.[17] In addition, it should also be recognised that the automatic adjustment of teachers' salaries to inflation has a positive impact on wage developments compared to teachers abroad.

The trend analysis made by the OECD in *Education at a Glance* shows that for bachelor's graduates, the real value of remuneration remains constant, but that for master's graduates it erodes (2015=100; 2022=92).[18]

Working hours

A full-time primary school teacher in Flanders has an average working week of 44.6 hours. A full-time teacher in the first grade of secondary education has an average working week of 39.7 hours. The significant difference in the number of working hours between primary and secondary education is largely due to the higher number of hours spent on teaching in primary education.[19]

Recent research among English teachers questions the oft-suggested proposition that greater work stress is linearly related to increasing working hours.[20] Measurement errors, including in TALIS data, are thought to be at the origin of this misunderstanding. According to this research, work stress and quality of life evolve in a non-linear way and would only become really worrying above 55 hours per week.

The time Flemish teachers spend on administrative tasks takes an average of 2.5 hours.[21] The Flemish time-use survey clocks in at 3.2 hours.[22] In the PISA top 6 countries, teachers spend an average of 3.3 hours on administrative tasks, in the countries participating in TALIS the average is 2.4 hours. Flemish teachers therefore spend about the same amount of time on administrative

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[17] *Ibid*., Tabel D3.3.

[18] *Ibid*., Tabel D3.8.

[19] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[20] Jerrim, J., Sims, S. (2021). When is high workload bad for teacher wellbeing? Accounting for the non-linear contribution of specific teaching tasks, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105/103395, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103395

[21]Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[22] Minnen, J., Verbeylen, J. en Glorieux, I. (2018). *Onderzoek naar de tijdsbesteding van leraren in het basis-en secundair onderwijs. Deel 1: Algemeen*, Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel; Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

tasks as their international colleagues, although they do report a higher degree of stress due to too much administration.[23]

Workability of the job

Teachers and school leaders are relatively satisfied with their jobs. They enjoy doing their work and get pleasure and satisfaction from it. However, workability is under pressure, partly due to work stress complaints and burnout symptoms.

The most recent report 'How workable is your job?' by the Innovation and Labour Foundation, the research centre of the SERV, shows that the education sector scores better than the total labour market on a number of parameters and is even improving.[24] Once again, it appears that the situation in education is not as dramatic as is often suggested in the media compared to other sectors. As far as workability indicators are concerned, there is a favourable evolution for work stress that is decreasing, motivation is increasing, as well as learning opportunities that are on the rise. Only in the area of work-life balance is there a noticeable decrease, and this situation is worse than the general labour market in Flanders. This is most likely due to the workload during the teaching weeks.

The risk factors for the workability of the job appear to be not too bad: the workload is less high, the emotional burden decreases, the task variation remains wide, and the manager improves. Only in terms of autonomy there is a slight decrease, but education still scores better than the general labour market in Flanders.

Absenteeism

The absence rate due to illness (including one-day sicknesses) was 4.65% in 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, this number has been increasing from year to year. Despite the limited comparability with other sectors (i.e. because there are more vacation days in education, the absenteeism rate is artificially lower), absenteeism in education seems similar to other sectors. Data from SDWorx show that in 2019, an average of 5.33% of working days, or the equivalent of 12.3 days per employee, were not performed due to short-term (2.67%) and medium-term (2.66%; between 1

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[23] Spruyt, B., Van Droogenbroeck, F., Siongers, J., Kavadias, D. (2023). Het lerarentekort kritisch bekeken vanuit internationaal vergelijkend perspectief. *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, 2022-2023, 1: 19-27. See de paragraaf

Administrative burden.

[24] Innovation and Labour Foundation (2023). *Hoe werkbaar is je job. Werkbaarheidsmeting werknemers 2023*. Brussel: SERV.
https://serv.be/sites/default/files/documenten/SERV_DB_20231004_WBM2023_Werknemers_RAP_StIA.pdf

month and 1 year) absenteeism.[25] In 2019, four out of ten employees in education were not absent for a single day due to illness.[26]

One of the possible explanations for the rising absenteeism rate is the above-mentioned increase in the number of staff in the age category of 56 to 65 years. Previous analyses show that absenteeism due to illness is higher in that age category. During the corona year 2020, there was a period (18 March to 20 May 2020) in which no sickness certificates were required for the absence of staff members, so we cannot compare data from that period.

Table 2. Absenteeism rates

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Teaching staff	4,02%	4,29%	4,30%	4,46%	4,63%
Management	4,14%	4,54%	4,67%	4,75%	4,86%

Administrative burden

The two main sources of stress for teachers are: the administrative burden and keeping up with the changing demands from the government and society.[27] Although not everyone interprets the concept of administrative burden in the same way, it is usually described as all kinds of (administrative) obligations that do not demonstrably contribute to qualitative education, and of which teachers do not see the usefulness.[28]

Administrative burden[29] is not only considered to be pointless paperwork, but it also enhances the feeling of not being able to deal with the core of education due to all kinds of (administrative) tasks that do not seem essential. It's about having to do too many tasks that aren't considered important, tasks that seem pointless, or of which it is unclear what they are meant for. Teachers were found to experience 33% of their work as administrative burden and indicate that the administrative burden has increased in recent years. 92% of the teachers in the survey indicated that they do carry out the tasks they experience as an administrative burden. [30]

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[25] SdWorx (2021). *Ziekteverzuim in België bereikt recordhoogte in 2021*. Persbericht 14/01/2022. https://www.sdworx.be/nl-be/over-sd-worx/pers/2022-01-14-Ziekteverzuim-belgie-bereikt-recordhoogte-2021

[26] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022).

[27] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[28] Kenis, P., Michielsens, P., van Andel, W. (2013). *Kom op tegen planlast! Onderzoek naar initiatieven die de planlast (irriterende regeldruk) voor scholen en leraren in het leerplichtonderwijs kunnen verminderen*, Antwerpen, Antwerp Management School.

[29] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2016). *Operatie Tarra. Onderzoek naar planlast*, https://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20160120-eindrapport-gOperatieTarra.pdf; Kenis, P., Michielsens, P. en van Andel, W. (2013); Devos G., Vanblaere B. & Bellemans L. (2018). *Stress en welbevinden bij schoolleiders: een analyse van bepalende factoren en van vereiste randvoorwaarden*. Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=11227; Muylaert, J., Decramer, A. & Audenaert, M. (2022). How Leader's Red Tape Interacts with Employees' Red Tape From the Lens of the Job Demands-Resources Model. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X221087420.

[30] Muylaert, J., Decramer, A. & Audenaert, M. (2022).

Administrative burden is linked to questions from various agents such as the government, but often also from the school networks. The role of the school leader is crucial. The way in which the school leader translates the questions from, among other things, the various policy levels and cross-school collaborations into school policy largely determines the administrative burden that teachers experience.

School leaders themselves find the number of regulations from governments other than education difficult to handle and indicate that they are often insufficiently aware of new policy initiatives and decisions. In response, school leaders sometimes start registering and reporting excessively to make sure their school is formally covered. For example, when setting up an internal quality assurance system, or when they prepare for an audit by the Education Inspectorate, these school leaders tend to ask excessive amounts of registration and documentation from their staff. The complex staff regulations are also a source of administrative burden for school leaders and teachers.[31] Digitalization also appears to be a cause of administrative burden. Because new technology and online learning platforms allow for more efficient registration and communication, people do it more often and spend more time on it.[32]

Finally, there is the feeling that the number of legal disputes in education is increasing (juridification) as an important source of administrative burden. As a result, school teams experience a pressure to justify their decisions and processes.[33] Disputes against those decisions are not systematically monitored by the central government, so no exact data are available. Every year, there are about twenty individual procedures at the Council of State. However, the procedure before the Council of State is the last possible procedural step. Parents or pupils who contest the decision of a class council first use the school's internal complaints procedure. A survey shows that 70% of the schools had to deal with internal appeal procedures in the school years 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. Over the three school years, 81% of schools had no more than one internal appeal procedure per school year.[34] In this context, research points to the importance of strengthening the autonomy of the teacher as a professional.[35]

Perceived appreciation for the profession

Although the teaching profession was highly respected and appreciated in the past centuries, its social status seems to have declined today. Dutch research suggests that the social status of a teacher is situated in a middle category, comparable to that of a nurse, a police officer, a journalist or an actor.[36] A recent study of how the teacher was portrayed in recent Dutch-language literature shows that that is predominantly negative, especially when it comes to their behaviour towards

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[31] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2016).

[32] Muylaert, J., Decramer, A. & Audenaert, M. (2022).

[33] Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021). *Naar de kern: de leerlingen en hun leer-kracht*. Rapport van de Commissie Beter Onderwijs. Brussel. https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/2021-10/RAPPORT-OK19%20oktober.pdf

[34] Driesen, C. (2021). *Het intern beroep in het gewoon voltijds secundair onderwijs: iedereen gelijk voor de wet? Onderzoek naar de rechtsbescherming in de onderwijspraktijk na het Rechtspositiedecreet voor leerlingen.* Proefschrift. https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1824240151162165141

[35] Spruyt, B. et al. (2023).

[36] Cörvers, F., Mommers, A., van der Ploeg, S. & Sapulete, S. (2017). *Status en imago van de leraar in de 21ste eeuw*. ROA: ROA Reports Nr. 005. https://doi.org/10.26481/umarep.2017005

pupils, their external presentation and their pedagogical skills.[37] At the same time, the SCV survey shows that the declining appreciation is in line with the declining confidence in education. Whereas in 2008 more than 80% of Flemish adults had (very) high confidence in education, this decreased to 70% in 2018.

Teachers themselves experience a declining social appreciation.[38] Less than a third of Flemish primary school teachers and a quarter of the teachers in the first stage of secondary education believe that the teaching profession is a highly valued profession in society. What is striking here is the sharp decline in the perceived appreciation of the teaching profession between 2013 and 2018. Flanders is the only region where such a sharp decline is visible.[39] Research into the causes of this decline is not yet available. Interviews with teachers, conducted as part of the OECD Teachers' Professional Learning Study, confirm that, according to teachers, the profession suffers from a bad image and low social status.[40]

Various causes for this have been identified in research literature and in the public debate. There is the increased general level of education of the population, with parents from the middle and upper socio-economic classes in particular more likely to question the authority of the teacher and the school. Teachers also indicate that they experience pressure to provide answers to the various expectations from society.[41] In addition, there is the general impression, also internationally, that the work of teachers has become heavier, more complex and more intensive in recent decades.[42]

There is also an impact of growing expectations about achieving high quality education, combined with the potential impact of teachers on student performance. Research shows that teachers feel that their profession is valued more in countries that score higher on the PISA tests. Moreover, the evolution of PISA scores in countries seems to go hand in hand with a downward or upward trend in perceived social appreciation.[43]

The often-problematic state of the school infrastructure also plays a role in the social appreciation of the profession.[44] In the 'war for talent', many companies boast of new and innovative office spaces in central locations, while the infrastructure of most Flemish schools is very outdated. The visibly outdated infrastructure reinforces the lower appreciation of external parties for the

[37] Dera, J., R. Smeets and T. van Wanrooij (2023), "The problem with all those teachers is that they are completely numb": Representations of Teachers and Education in Recent Dutch Novels, *Dutch Crossing – Journal of Low Countries Studies*, https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2023.2230682

[38] OESO (2020a). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en.

[39] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[40] Minea-Pic, A., Nusche, D., Sinnema, C. & Stoll, L. (2021). *Teachers' Professional Learning Study. Diagnostic Report for the Flemish Community of Belgium*, OECD Education Policy Perspectives, nr. 31. https://doi.org/10.1787/7a6d6736-en

[41] Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021); Spruyt, B. et al. (2023).

[42] Creagh, S., Thompson, G., Mockler, N., Stacey, M. & Hogan, A. (2023). Workload, work intensification and time poverty for teachers and school leaders: a systematic research synthesis, *Educational Review*, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2196607; Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021).

[43] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[44] AGION (2020). *Schoolgebouwenmonitor 2018-2019 - Indicatoren voor de kwaliteit van de schoolgebouwen in Vlaanderen.* Brussel: Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs. https://www.agion.be/sites/default/files/images/D_Schoolgebouwenmonitor_20182019.pdf

teaching profession. Although more efforts have been made in recent years to renovate school buildings, more attention should be paid to this in the future.[45]

Professionalisation

Full-time primary school teachers spend an average of 0.9 hours per week on professional development and 0.8 hours per week in secondary education. That's about 2% of the total working time. These numbers are lower than international colleagues who spend an average of 1.3 hours in the EU top-5 countries and 1.5 hours in the PISA top-6 countries on professional development.[46]

According to teachers, the main barriers to participating in professionalisation are the challenge of combining this with the teaching tasks, the cost, family obligations, the lack of incentives and the lack of a relevant offer.[47] In this context, recent research points to the importance of school culture and leadership, which can be both an inhibiting and a stimulating factor for the professionalisation of teachers.[48] Crucial in this respect are the degree of alignment of the staffing and professionalisation policy with the school's policy and strategic planning, and the extent to which teachers' needs are aligned with the needs of the school.

In addition to these external influencing factors, the intrinsic motivation of Flemish teachers is also limited when it comes to participation in professionalisation activities. Flemish teachers report a lower need for professional development for almost all domains compared to their international colleagues from EU-14 and PISA top-6 countries. The need among Flemish teachers to professionalise has even decreased compared to previous measurements in 2008 and 2013.[49]

These findings are diametrically opposed to the recurring recommendations from Flemish (such as surveys and policy evaluations) and international research (PISA and PIRLS) to pay more attention to high-quality professionalisation in order to tackle specific educational issues and improve the quality of education.[50]

In addition to the volume of working time spent on professionalisation, the nature of the professionalisation activities is important. Research shows that it is important that these are tailored to the specific needs and context of teachers or schools. In addition, deeper forms of collaboration or collaborative learning, such as co-teaching or observing each other's lessons and working in an evidence-informed way, appear to be more effective.[51]

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[45] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022).

[46] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] Vekeman, E., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020). *Personeelsbeleid vanuit schoolperspectief: Eindrapport.* Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12871

[49] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[50] Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021).

[51] Vanderlinde, R., Tuytens, M., Devos, G. & Merchie, E. (2015). *Indicatoren voor de effectiviteit van professionaliseringsinitiatieven.* https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=6215; De Smet, M., Vanblaere, B., Ruys, I. & Frijns, C. (2020). *Collectief leren via samenwerking met externe (onderwijs)professionals.* Gent: Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12089; Timperley H. (2008). *Teacher Professional Learning and Development.* Educational Practices Series-18. UNESCO International Bureau of Education, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000179161; Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021).

However, research has established that the nature of the professional development activities of Flemish teachers takes rather traditional forms, such as following a course or attending an (external) training day. Compared to their international colleagues, Flemish teachers spend less time collaborating and consulting with colleagues within their school. For example, 49% of Flemish teachers in lower secondary education have never participated[52] 40.4% of school leaders in lower secondary education ask for support in developing collaboration between teachers, compared to an international average of 26%. The OECD therefore sees major challenges for Flanders in the field of collaborative learning and evidence-informed working.[53]

The OECD sees a link between the above-mentioned findings, the lack of incentives to professionalize and the definition of a teacher's task in terms of teaching hours. According to the OECD, this feeds the perception that professionalisation is not part of the teacher's core mission.[54] Recent Flemish research confirms this finding.[55]

Attrition from the teaching profession

Comments on the teacher shortage often refer to the attrition rate, which is said to be relatively high. Permanent appointed teachers, however, tend to stay. The (projected) attrition of employees under the age of 55 in the education sector (6.4%) is significantly lower than the Flemish sector average (15.4%).[56] This shows that the teaching profession still has a high degree of stability and that the potential for teacher retention is high.

Attrition at the beginning of the career is higher than for the career as a whole. Between 2016 and 2021, approximately 14.4% of the group of teachers under the age of 30 have left the education sector.[57] But compared to other sectors, this is rather low. A certain amount of job mobility is normal for every sector. With 13% of 20-29-year-olds (7.8% of 30-39-year-olds) changing jobs in a year's time in 2019, job mobility outside education is also high.[58] Data also indicate that the outflow intention in Flanders, at 16.6%, is lower than the international average of 25.1%.[59]

The reasons for the attrition of starters are diverse, but job insecurity at the start of the career appears to be an important factor.[60] Young teachers often start in temporary assignments with great job insecurity. On the other hand, staff members can acquire a so-called 'temporary appointment of continuous duration' and even a permanent appointment the short term. The share of teachers with a tenure increased from 71% in 2017 to 75% in 2022. As of September 2021, the number of days of seniority required to qualify for a permanent appointment was

[52] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a).

[53] Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021).

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] Delrue, K., Meirsschaut M. & Ruys I. (2020). *Teamteaching en collectief leren.* Steunpunt SONO. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/onderwijsonderzoek/project/429

[56] Neefs, B. & Vansteenkiste, S. (2022). De aanwervingsbehoefte in de Vlaamse sectoren richting 2030. Over.Werk. *Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt Werk*, 32(1), pp. 29-40. https://www.steunpuntwerk.be/files/OverWerk_2022_1_03.pdf

[57] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (s.d.) Databank. Eigen berekening.

[58] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022).

[59] OESO (2020).

[60] Struyven, K. & Vanthournout, G. (2014). Teachers' exit decisions: An investigation into the reasons why newly qualified teachers fail to enter the teaching profession or why those who do enter do not continue teaching, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 43, 37-45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.06.002

lowered. Recent research shows that when choosing their careers, including the attrition, teachers often consider the same factors, such as job motivation, self-efficacy, challenge and variety, and relationships and support from colleagues and school management.[61]

Although there is no direct correlation between attrition and classroom difficulty, several sources indicate that younger teachers with little experience are more strongly represented in schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged students. However, diversity and a more challenging student audience is not so much driving teachers out of the teaching profession as it is driving them to other schools.[62]

So, while the attrition rate of young teaching staff is not alarmingly high in itself, it does cause many problems. The early attrition is detrimental not only to the supply of teachers, but also for the education budget (these teachers previously received specialized training as teachers), for the stability of the organisation and, ultimately, for the quality of education. Teachers should be given the opportunity to grow in the profession. Especially in the first two years of a teacher's teaching, we observe a sharp increase in learning performance that the teacher creates in his/her students.[63] Administrative data from the 2019-20 school year shows that 37.2% of starting out secondary school teachers leave school within a five-year period.[64] We know from research in other sectors that the quality of human resources policy and human resources management is a crucial factor in counteracting the phenomenon of "fast quitting".[65] Qualitative onboarding and support at the start of the career can make all the difference. Later in this report, we will discuss these aspects in more detail.

Moreover, not all newly graduated teachers go to education. In 2011, the transfer rate from teacher training to education was 81% for professional bachelor's degrees and 33% for university teacher training programs.[66] Despite the deliberate choice for a specific training such as that of teacher, after 5 years into the profession only half of the professional bachelors and a fifth of the masters is working as a teacher.[67]

[61] Mombaers, T., Vanlommel, K., en Van Petegem, P. (2020). *De Loopbaan van Onderwijsprofessionals*. Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent. https://steunpuntsono.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2.4_De-loopbaan-van-onderwijsprofessionals.pdf

[62] Nusche, D., Miron, G., Santiago, P., Teese, R. (2015). *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Flemish Community of Belgium 2015*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264247598-en

[63] Atteberry, A., Loeb, S. & Wyckoff, J. (2015). Do first impressions matter? Predicting early career teacher effectiveness. *AERA Open*, 1(4), https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858415607834.

[64] Response of Minister Ben Weyts to a question of Mr. Jan Laeremans. https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1614561

[65] https://press.securex.be/een-op-zes-aanwervingen-met-vast-contract-eindigt-al-binnen-de-zes-maanden

[66] Laurijssen I. & Glorieux I. (2018). *Arbeidsmarktintrede van schoolverlaters in Vlaanderen. Werk- en salaristrajecten en (mis)match bij schoolverlaters van een leraren-, zorg- of STEM-opleiding*. Research paper SONO/2018/OL1.7/2, Gent: Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek - TOR 2018/28. https://torvub.be/publication/arbeidsmarktintrede-van-schoolverlaters-in-vlaanderen-werk-en-salaristrajecten-en-mismatch-bij-schoolverlaters-van-een-leraren-zorg-of-stem-opleiding/

[67] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022).

The labour market situation for teachers

Increasing shortage in the labour market for teachers

The total number of staff employed in education has increased by 8.8% over the past five years. In January 2022, Flemish primary education had 71,848 staff members (expressed in FTEs). Secondary education had 73,139. In total, there were 144,987 employees.[68]

However, the education sector is struggling with an increasing shortage in the labour market. An indication of this can be seen in the (albeit slight) decrease in the proportion of teachers with the required certificate of competence over time.[69] Teachers are increasingly deployed outside subjects for which they have the required certificate of competence. This is mainly the case in replacement assignments, where the proportion of teachers with a different certificate of competence varies from 14% to 16% for subjects such as Dutch, French, English and mathematics (four years earlier it varied between 5 and 8%).[70]
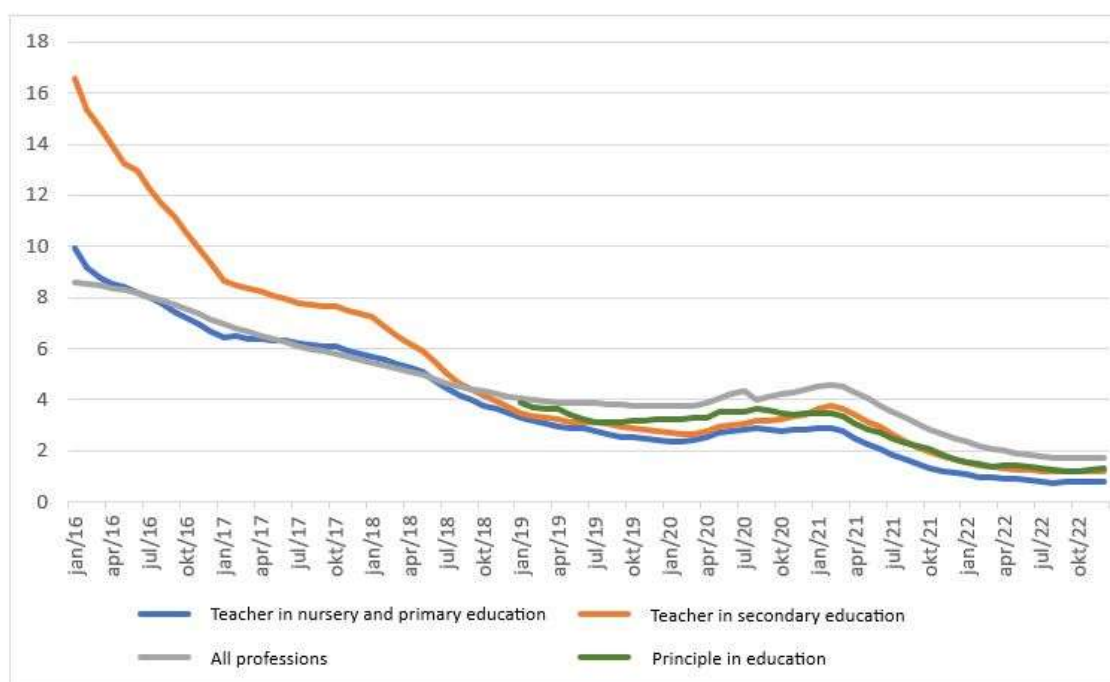
Figure 1: The labour market scarcity rate for teaching professions vs. all professions combined

[68] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2018*). Statistisch jaarboek van het Vlaams onderwijs (2016-2017)* https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/33256; Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022a).

[69] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022b). *Dataverzameling in voorbereiding van Vlaamse openbare statistiek over de bekwaamheidsbewijzen van leraren*, Intern document.

[70] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2023b). *De toekomstige arbeidsmarkt voor onderwijspersoneel in Vlaanderen 2022-2030*; Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2019). *De toekomstige arbeidsmarkt voor onderwijspersoneel in Vlaanderen 2018-2028*, https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/30960
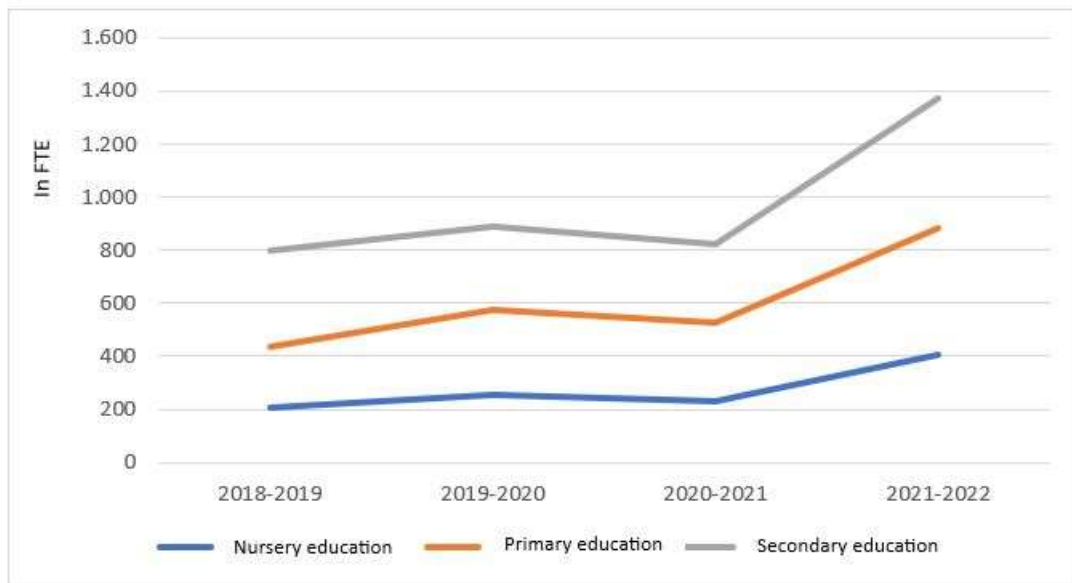
Figure 2. Unfilled replacements expressed in FTE per school year[71]

The stress indicator decreases more sharply for the teaching profession than for the other professions (see **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**).[72] For the time being, it seems that most schools can still make full use of their staff subsidies.[73] However, due to an exhausted labour market reserve, it is becoming increasingly difficult to replace absent teaching staff in the short term.

Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden. shows that the number of unfilled replacements increased sharply in the 2021-2022 school year (+85% compared to the 2018-2019 school year).[74]

The teacher shortage may be a possible explanation for the increased stress and workload and the quite high level of absenteeism due to illness, where the frequency of psychosocial disorders is particularly striking.[75]

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[71] Bron: Monitoring personeel onderwijs (Agodi).

[72] Bron: https://www.vdab.be/trendsdoc/beroepen/index.html; De spanningsindicator meet de krapte op de arbeidsmarkt. Hij geeft de verhouding weer tussen het aantal werkzoekenden zonder werk in bemiddeling en het aantal beschikbare vacatures. Als deze verhouding groot is, verloopt het invullen van de jobs vlotter. In het secundair onderwijs zijn er ook verschillen tussen vakken.

[73] Agentschap voor Overheidsdiensten (2022). *Oefening berekening in het kader van structureel lerarentekort. Vergelijking van het aanwendbare en het aangewende urenpakket*. Intern document.

[74] Het gaat om dienstonderbrekingen die recht geven op een vervanging volgens de reguliere vervangingsregels (bijvoorbeeld afwezigheid titularis van minimum 10 werkdagen…), maar waarvoor geen vervanger wordt aangesteld (See https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=15154#1).

[75] Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten (2021). *Rapport afwezigheden naar aanleiding van Ziete 2021* https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/52815

The teacher shortage increases the chance that students will not be taught for longer periods. Given the crucial impact of teachers on the quality of education, this has a negative impact on the quality of education and the learning outcomes of students. A correlation was found in primary education between the number of unfilled replacements at school level and learning performance. When an average primary school with 13 teachers is unable to fill one vacancy, this leads to an estimated learning delay of 2.1 teaching weeks for Dutch and 2.6 teaching weeks for mathematics.[76]

The shortage of teachers is not evenly distributed across regions, levels of education and subjects (see Table 3). For example, the shortage (estimated based on the tension rate on the labour market) is much greater in urbanized regions such as Brussels and Antwerp than in more rural regions such as Limburg. For primary education, in the districts of Aalst, Antwerp, Diksmuide, Eeklo, Ghent, Halle-Vilvoorde, Ostend and Sint-Niklaas, there is less than one candidate available for each vacancy. There are no VDAB data for Brussels, but the percentage of teachers with a different certificate of competence there indicates that the shortage there is also very large. Although the demand for teachers is high at all levels of education, the urgency is lower in pre-primary education. That is why nursery schoolteachers are not explicitly marked as a bottleneck profession, in contrast to the other educational professions such as primary and secondary school teachers.[77]

In secondary education, the needs differ depending on the subject. Based on proxy indicators such as the proportion of staff with a different certificate of competence, we see that there are shortages of language teachers (Dutch, French and English) and teachers of mathematics and Catholic religion. In addition, it is difficult to find suitable candidates for subjects such as electricity, mechanics, home economics, 'Project General Subjects' and technology.[78] Although VDAB recently stated that by now it is difficult to find teachers for all subjects.[79]

[76] De Witte, K. & Gambi, L. (2023).

[77] Vlaamse Dienst Voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (2023). *Knelpuntberoepen in Vlaanderen*, https://www.vdab.be/sites/default/files/media/files/Knelpuntberoepen2023.pdf

[78] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2019) De toekomstige arbeidsmarkt voor onderwijspersoneel in Vlaanderen 2018-2028, https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/30960

[79] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2023c). Interne dataverzameling

Table 3. Tension ratio by arrondissement in March 2023[80]

District	Nursery or primary school teacher	Secondary school teacher
Alost	0,64	0,72
Antwerp	0,55	1,16
Bruges	1,23	0,92
Dendermonde	1,07	0,91
Diksmuide	0,60	0,31
Eeklo	0,91	0,68
Ghent	0,67	1,58
Halle-Vilvoorde	0,75	1,18
Hasselt	4,66	2,01
Ypres	1,46	1,73
Courtrai	1,46	0,93
Leuven	1,57	1,99
Maaseik	11,94	3,03
Malines	1,39	0,9
Ostende	0,51	1,54
Oudenaarde	1,79	1,57
Roeselare	1,37	0,77
Saint-Nicolas	0,35	0,73
Tielt	1,79	0,84
Tongeren	7,94	2,82
High Rock	2,24	1,74
Veurne	1,23	0,81

Demographic factors

The teacher shortage is a consequence of two broader demographic evolutions, namely an increase in the number of pupils and an ageing of the population (and therefore also the teacher population). Both factors have an influence on the (future) recruitment need in education. Figures from the Department of Education and Training show that in the period between the school years 2011-12 and 2019-20, the number of pupils in primary education increased by 12.8%, which means that more teachers and/or larger classes are needed. In the 2020-21 school year, there was a decrease (of 0.3%) in the number of pupils in primary education for the first time. Given that these primary school pupils have moved on or will move on to secondary education in the near future, this also has consequences for the demand for teachers in secondary education, where the number of pupils has been increasing annually since 2015-16 and there have already been 5.5% more pupils since 2017-18.[81] The large number of part-time jobs will further increase the need for teachers. Although the average Flemish teacher is with 39.6 years younger than

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[80] Bron: VDAB, *Beroepen in cijfers*, https://www.vdab.be/trendsdoc/beroepen/index.html
[81] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2019). *De toekomstige arbeidsmarkt voor onderwijspersoneel in Vlaanderen 2018-2028*, https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/30960

abroad (according to TALIS 2018 data 42.5 years) and compared to employees in the private sector (42.3 years on average in 2017),[82] there is a large group of teachers who will soon leave by reaching retirement age.

Based on data from the AGODI personnel database, De Witte and Iterbeke compared the age pyramids of secondary school teachers by subject and by province.[83] Overall, about 30 percent of teachers are 50 years of age or older. The demographic structure differs remarkably by subject and region. For example, teachers in the Brussels-Capital Region are on average younger. Teachers of Catholic religion, visual arts and electricity are on average older, which means that replacements will be sought more quickly in the near future. Wood and electricity teachers in vocational education, applied economics and mechanics teachers in technical education in particular are older than the average teacher. A possible explanation for this is that principals mainly use teachers with previously acquired experience in the private sector for these technical and practical subjects. These findings point to the need to address the current and future teacher shortage in a differentiated way.

Recruitment needs

The annual total influx of new administrative and teaching staff in primary and secondary education together increased from 4,883 FTEs to 7,177 FTEs between 2017-18 and 2021-22 (**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**, full line). The forecast predicts a continued hiring requirement of more than 6,000 FTEs year-on-year until 2026-27. In doing so, we make an abstraction of the already existing shortages. If we count the last known unfilled replacements (cf. **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**) would increase by a further 2,664 FTEs.

However, a downward trend is forecast for the long term and in 2029-30 the recruitment needs are at 5,211 FTEs (**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**, dotted line).[84] Moreover, previous forecasts indicate that there is sometimes a significant difference between forecasted and actual recruitment needs, especially for pre-primary education. The forecast does not show any regional differences.[85]

A point of attention here is that the influx into teacher training programs has been declining for some time. Since the reform of teacher training in 2019, there seems to have been a slight increase in the number of starters, although there may be some noise on these figures due to the shift of teacher training from adult education to higher education. After all, the last academic year 2021-2022 shows a slight decline in the number of starters in teacher training. The most recent, non-final figures for the 2022-2023 academic year show an increase in the number of first-generation students.[86] It therefore seems that the long-term decline in the influx has stopped for the time being. For the time being, the number of starters in educational graduates is limited. It is

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[82] Acerta (2019). *Werknemer in België gemiddeld 11 maanden jonger dan jaar geleden*. Persbericht 25/10/2019. https://www.acerta.be/nl/insights/in-de-pers/werknemer-in-belgie-gemiddeld-11-maanden-jonger-dan-jaar-geleden#:~:text=Brussel%2C%2025%20oktober%202019%20E2%80%93%20De,alle%20statuten%2C%20sectoren%20en%20regio's.

[83] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022).

[84] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2023d). Interne dataverzameling

[85] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2019) De toekomstige arbeidsmarkt voor onderwijspersoneel in Vlaanderen 2018-2028, https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/30960

[86] Agentschap Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen (2023). Hoger onderwijs in cijfers Academiejaar 2022-2023, https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/52403

possible that this will have an impact in the near future on the availability of practical teachers in particular.
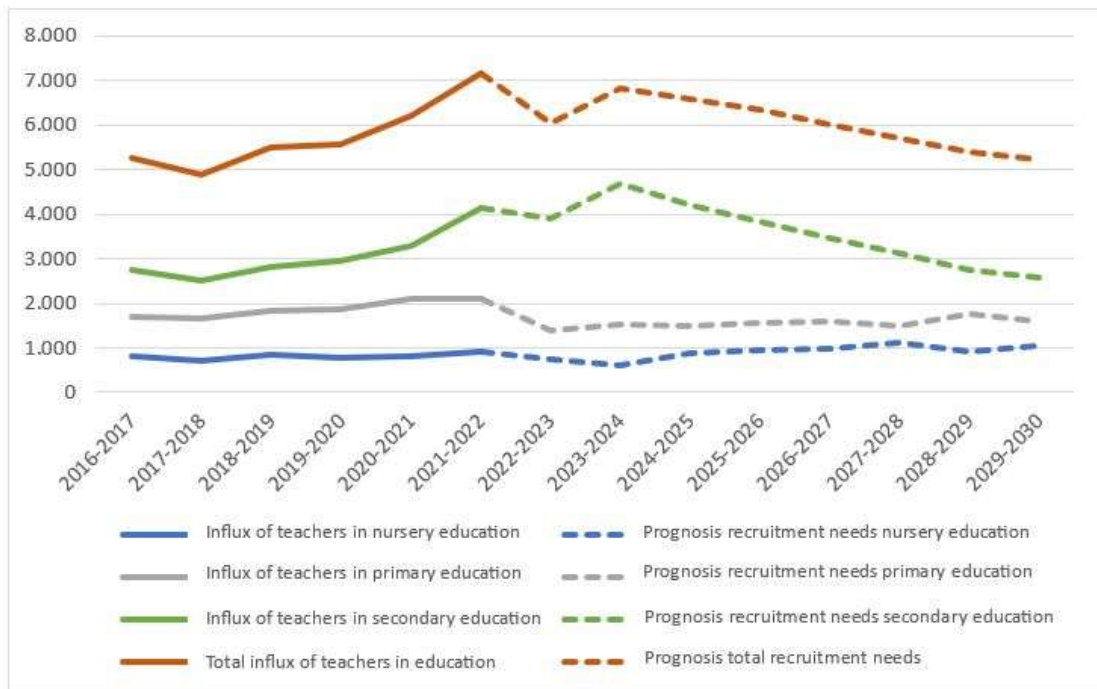
Figure 3. Annual recruitment needs for new staff (in full-time equivalent)

However, the side-entrance into teacher training and the profession is increasing. The average age of students in teacher training programs is rising. Whereas in 2016-2017 11% of students in the educational bachelors in the secondary education teacher training programs were 26 years or older, this share rose to 32% in 2021-2022.[87] Between 2019-20 and 2021-22, the number of career changers into the profession increased by 118% in primary education and 85% in secondary education. A total of 4,279 career changers were involved in the 2021-2022 school year. On the other hand, 28% of career changers in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years are no longer active in education the school year after they join.[88]

If we combine demand (recruitment need) and supply (students and graduates of teacher training), we can expect that the shortage on the labour market for teachers will remain high in the coming years. In the longer term (from 2030 onwards), this shortage is likely to decrease slightly. An analysis by the Policy Research Centre Work and Social Economy comes to a similar conclusion. Since a relatively low attrition is expected and an average employment growth is expected, the relative future recruitment need in education is the lowest compared to other economic sectors in Flanders.[89]

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[87] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022c). Monitor lerarenopleiding, https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestanden/Monitor%20voor%20Lerarenopleiding.pdf

[88] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2023e) Interne dataverzameling

[89] Neefs, B. & Vansteenkiste, S. (2022). De aanwervingsbehoefte in de Vlaamse sectoren richting 2030. *Over.Werk. Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt Werk*, 32(1), pp. 29-40, https://www.steunpuntwerk.be/files/OverWerk_2022_1_03.pdf
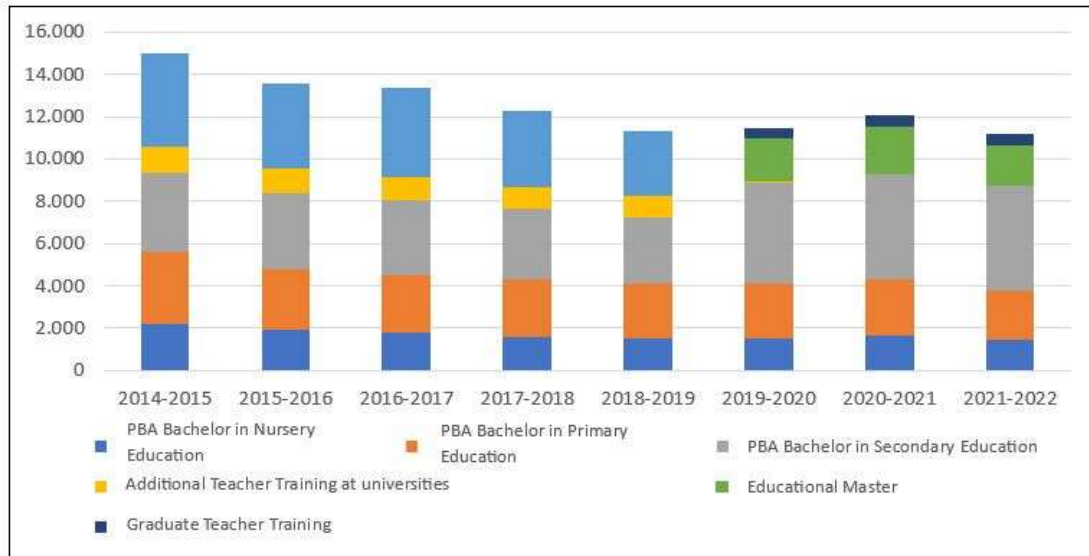
Figure 4. Number of starters in the various teacher training programmes

This cautious optimism in the long term warrants some reservations. For example, the short-term needs are high, and this in a period when the labour market reserve is already exhausted. It is therefore possible that the future long-term relaxation in the labour market will be partly offset by the shortages that have accumulated in the meantime. Moreover, such estimates must also take into account pupil forecasts, which are not always easy to predict.

Developments in the field of school leaders

Importance of School Leaders for Quality Education

School leaders are essential to achieve an optimal learning environment for the students and the same working environment for the teachers to achieve a high quality of education.[90] After all, a well-thought-out and strategic vision of the school organisation and personnel policy is indispensable.[91] The profession of school leader is challenging and complex, and there are many societal expectations that must be met. During the corona pandemic, these challenges were brought to the fore.[92]

The quality of school leadership is also the important factor for an efficient work organisation that keeps the workload of teachers manageable. The extent to which strategies are effective in

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[90] Devos, G. (2019). Kenmerken van sterke scholen. Wat leert ons 40 jaar onderzoek? *Impuls. Leiderschap in onderwijs*, 2019-2020 (1), 4-16.; Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021); Pont, B., D. Nusche and H. Moorman (2008). *Improving School Leadership*, Volume 1, OECD Publishing, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264044715-en; Day, D., Gu, Q. & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221-258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863

[91] Devos, G. (2019).

[92] Gurr, D. (2023). *A think-piece on leadership and education*. Paper Committee for the 2024/5 Global Education Monitoring Report, Leadership and education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384529/PDF/384529eng.pdf.multi 4

managing the workload and achieving workable work depends to a large extent on the quality of the school management.[93] A recent review by the Education Endowment Foundation of the available scholarly studies points to three interconnected leadership approaches and related practices to support teacher retention: (i) prioritizing teacher professional development; (ii) building relational trust; and (iii) improving working conditions.[94] The review also highlights four prominent features of school culture, climate, and structure that promote collegiality, positive school discipline, intellectual stimulation, equity in workload arrangements and support sharing. In 2022, there were 3,092 FTE school leaders in primary education and 2,728 FTE in secondary education. These include directors, deputy directors, coordinators, technical advisors and technical advisor coordinators. In addition, there are 165 FTE upper school leaders in primary education and 85 in secondary education (general and coordinating directors and director-coordinators of a school community).[95]

School leadership includes giving direction, building relationships, developing people, developing the school as an educational organisation, improving the learning environment and the educational processes.[96]

Research distinguishes three types of leadership: educational and transformational leadership, administrative leadership and system leadership. School leaders in Flanders, as in other countries, mainly focus on educational and transformational leadership, such as working with teachers to solve discipline problems or taking action so that teachers feel responsible for the performance of their pupils. Less attention is paid to aspects of system leadership where schools strengthen relationships with the wider school environment. Between 2013 and 2018, there have been few changes in the type of leadership among school leaders. There has only been an increase in support actions for better cooperation between teachers to develop new teaching practices.

Characteristics of the school leader population

In the 2021-2022 school year, the share of female school leaders was 66.3% in primary education and 47.2% in secondary education.[97] Countries with more female teachers have a higher proportion of female school leaders. Flanders deviates from this by combining a highly feminized teaching staff with a rather average proportion of female school leaders.[98]

Just like the teachers, school leaders in Flanders are relatively young: the school leader in primary education is on average 48.7 years and 48.5 years in the first stage of secondary education. In Flanders, the vast majority of school leaders work full-time. A limited number of school leaders

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[93] Martin, K., Classick, R., Sharp, C., Faulkner-Ellis, H. (2023). *Supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers in schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils: understanding current practice around managing teacher workload. Practice review.* London: EEF/NFER. https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-teacher-workload-management-approaches.pdf?v=1699865155

[94] Nguyen, D., Huat See, B., Brown, Chr., Kokotsaki, D. (2023). Reviewing the evidence base on school leadership, culture, climate and structure for teacher retention. Rapid evidence assessment. London: EEF/NFER. https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-leadership-approaches.pdf?v=1699862027

[95] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022a)

[96] Leithwood, K. (2012). *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012*, with a discussion of the Research Foundations. Ontario: Institute for Education Leadership.

[97] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2022a)

[98] The next paragraph is based on: Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a)

still have a small teaching job assignment. This is more often the case in other countries than in Flanders. Flemish school leaders, like their international colleagues, have almost always been teachers first. A school leader in primary education has an average of 17.6 years of experience as a teacher, while a colleague in the first grade of secondary education has 16.1 years. They often have completed additional training to become a school leader, often together with training in educational leadership.

Flemish school leaders in primary education have an average of 9.2 years of work experience as a school leader, of which 8.5 years in their current school. In the first stage of secondary education, the average work experience of the school leaders is 7.8 years and all this in their current school.

Flemish school leaders in primary education and in the first stage of secondary education have a shorter level of education on average. In primary education, 96.2% of school leaders have a bachelor's degree or equivalent. In the first stage of secondary education, half of the school leaders have a bachelor's degree.

In the most recent CLA XIII (concluded in 2021), it was agreed that the wage tension between teachers and school leaders in primary and secondary education is at least 31%. In time, this will evolve to 35%. Internationally, the wages of Flemish school leaders appear to be higher than the OECD average, but lower than, for example, in the neighbouring country of the Netherlands.[99]

Time spent on administrative and leadership tasks.

A school leader spends the most time on administrative and leadership tasks. Together, these two tasks take up half of the school leader's working time. School leaders spend a similar proportion of their time on tasks and meetings related to the curriculum, interacting with parents, and interacting with external stakeholders. School leaders in the first grade of secondary education spend a significantly larger part of their time interacting with pupils than their colleagues in primary education.[100] Compared to 2013, more and more time is spent on administrative and leadership tasks and on meetings.

Professionalisation

On average, school leaders participate in six different professional development activities each year. They participate the most in courses and seminars on pedagogical topics and on leadership, more than their colleagues in other countries. Reading professional literature is also a common form of professional development. In addition, school leaders are more likely than their international counterparts to participate in networks set up for professional development. Conversely, they had fewer learning experiences with peer, self-observation and coaching.

School leaders indicate that they are most in need of professional development on the use of pupil and school data to support internal quality assurance, followed by training on how to promote collaboration between teachers, how to provide effective feedback, how to develop the school curriculum and how to develop professional training for or with teachers.

More than their international colleagues, school leaders in Flanders indicate that they feel less limited in their professional development by family obligations and that they have access to a relevant offer and more incentives to participate. The combination with an overly busy work

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[99] OECD (2023).
[100] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a)

schedule is an important reason for not participating in professional development. In primary education, the high cost is also an obstacle.

Job satisfaction and absenteeism

In both primary education and the first stage of secondary education, most school leaders feel happy and are satisfied with their jobs.[101] They are also happy with the work environment. Like teachers, school leaders are satisfied with their profession, but not to the same extent as with the work environment.

Despite job satisfaction, the absenteeism rate of school leaders is higher than that of all other staff categories in education (cf.

Table 2).[102] The average number of sick days is highest for primary school leaders. Especially in the data   of

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Teaching staff	4,02%	4,29%	4,30%	4,46%	4,63%
Management	4,14%	4,54%	4,67%	4,75%	4,86%

psychosocial disorders, there is a relative overrepresentation of managers.[103] Flemish research shows that internal factors within the school, external factors in the school environment, or personal factors can cause lower well-being, more stress or an increased risk of burnout.[104] School leaders in compulsory education experience more stress in their work than their international colleagues. This is mainly due to having to keep up with rapidly changing demands from society and from the government, as well as to an excessive amount of administrative work.[105]

Shortage of school leaders

Continuity in school policy is important in order to maintain a high quality of education, even when there is a change of school leader.[106] However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to replace a school leader who is leaving, because just like with teachers, there is a shortage of school leaders. The stress ratio for school leaders fell from 3.9 in January 2019 to 1.3 in December 2022, which means that it is more difficult to fill vacancies for school leaders. Since 2021, the position of principal in an educational institution has been included in VDAB's list of shortage professions.

During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 1,547 management changes, of which 246 were due to retirement. In addition to retirement, there are several other reasons for a change of management. For example, many school leaders make use of a system of leave to be able to work elsewhere temporarily, or a management position is sometimes temporarily shared by several staff members.[107]

Strategic personnel policy

Internal school context variables such as the level of education, the pupil population and the size of the school appear to have little influence on the extent to which schools work on a strategic

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[101] *Ibid.*

[102] Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten (2019)

[103] Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten (2021); Devos, G., Vanblaere, B. & Bellemans, L. (2018).

[104] Devos et al. (2018)

[105] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2020a)

[106] Devos, G. (2019).

[107] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming, Databank Onderwijs en vorming

personnel policy. Schools mainly experience external context factors as an obstacle to the implementation of a strategic personnel policy. These are factors that are linked to the labour market and educational context, such as overly strict regulations or too limited financial resources.[108] Cultural characteristics of the school also play a role in shaping a strategic personnel policy. This includes the extent to which teachers experience autonomy, whether there is a culture of collaboration and teacher participation, and whether there is a commitment to shared leadership.[109]

The personnel policy in Flemish schools is further determined or influenced by the school board and the school community. Optimal cooperation between the school board and the school leader is essential for the positive functioning and good governance of the school. Where optimal cooperation is lacking, this is associated with negative outcomes, such as low trust, reduced morale and extra work for the board or school leader.[110]

More Shared Leadership

There is a trend, both internationally and in Flanders, towards an increasing focus on forms of shared leadership in education, in which various staff members take on leadership tasks together.[111] As a result, the leadership capacity of the system as a whole is strengthened. From a comparative perspective, Flanders is characterized by a high degree of shared leadership, in which decisions are made by the school leader in consultation with other members of a school policy team, with teachers, with an upper school policy level and in coordination with the school board. This is most evident for leadership tasks related to educational policy, such as evaluation policy or the choice of teaching materials.

The OECD notes that shared leadership in Flemish education is very diverse, but that not all potential is exploited.[112]

Developments in the field of school boards

The increasing autonomy of schools, the increasing demand for accountability by schools and the trend towards economies of scale and cross-school education policies are not only important for schools and their school leaders. For several years now, these developments have placed

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[108] Vekeman, E., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020).

[109] *Ibid*.; Backers, L., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020). *Het aantrekken en behouden van leraren in een grootstedelijke context*. Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent; Mombaers, T., Vanlommel, K., en Van Petegem, P. (2020). *De Loopbaan van Onderwijsprofessionals*. Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent; Moens, M., Depoorter, A., Vandaele, F., Vanblaere, B., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2022). *Psychosociaal welzijnsbeleid als onderdeel van strategisch personeelsbeleid in scholen*. Wetenschappelijk rapport

[110] Devos, G., Verhoeven, J. Beuselinck, I., Van den Broeck, H. & Vandenberghe, R. (1999). *De rol van schoolbesturen in het schoolmanagement*. Leuven: Garant; Rekenhof (2019). *Schoolbesturen in het leerplichtonderwijs*. Verslag goedgekeurd in de Nederlandse kamer van het Rekenhof op 23 juli 2019 Vlaams Parlement, 37-A (2019) – Nr. 1; Vanhoof, J., Sneyers, E. & Van Petegem, P. (2018). *Vragenlijst sterkschoolbestuur.be. Ontwikkeld in opdracht van de Koning Boudewijnstichting voor het zelfevaluatie-instrument.*

[111] Devos, G. (2019).

[112] Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021).

increasing demands on school boards in Flanders and beyond.[113] Current challenges such as the acute teacher shortage; the difficulty of attracting and retaining school leaders; the need for professionalisation of school leaders; and the introduction of the central tests in Flanders means that the expectations with regard to school boards are increasing.

Despite these increased expectations and identified needs, the government in Flanders has so far been rather cautious in its policy towards school boards.[114] Although the government imposes certain rules on school boards, it is not entirely clear what the Flemish government expects from school boards. In the Netherlands, for example, this is more the case where, among other things, a Code of Good Governance has been developed. At the same time, few measures have been taken to support and strengthen school boards in Flanders to date. However, the need for support for school boards has already been underlined.[115] Moreover, the need for in-depth research into the functioning of Flemish school boards has been emphasized several times.[116] In this context, it was recently stated that Flemish school boards are often an unknown 'black box'.[117]

This item has received more attention in foreign research (e.g. in the U.S., the United Kingdom and the Netherlands). It has been established that school boards do have an impact on school development.[118] We also know from previous Flemish research that the administrative power (i.e. the way in which school boards manage the schools) plays a crucial role in the policy-making capacity of the schools.[119] Moreover, in recent years, Flemish research into various school policy aspects, such as personnel policy, [120] financing[121] or the well-being of school leaders, has repeatedly underlined the crucial role of good cooperation between school management and school leaders.[122]

A consequence of increased knowledge and awareness of the importance of school boards is the question of how school boards are best organized. However, there is no definitive answer to this question.[123] Both in Flanders and abroad, it is established that there is no unambiguous model for the organisation and functioning of a school board. This is due to the enormous complexity and diversity of how boards are composed and function.[124] Nevertheless, international research (especially from the United States) points to a number of recurring characteristics of policy

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[113] Devos, G. (2008). Professionalisering van schoolbesturen: hefbomen voor een sterk bestuurskracht. *Personeel en Organisatie, 19*, 87–108; Honingh, M., Ruiter, M., & Thiel, S. van. (2020). Are school boards and educational quality related? Results of an international literature review. *Educational Review, 72*, 2, 157–172.

[114] Rekenhof (2019). *Schoolbesturen in het leerplichtonderwijs*. Verslag van Het Rekenhof Aan Het Vlaams Parlement. Brussel.

[115] Devos, G. (2008).

[116] Devos, G., Verhoeven, J., Beuselinck, I., van den Broeck, H., & Vandenberghe, R. (1999); Rekenhof (2019).

[117] Onderwijsinspectie (2023). *Onderwijsspiegel. Jaarlijks rapport van de onderwijsinspectie*. Vlaamse Overheid. https://www.onderwijsinspectie.be/sites/default/files/2023-03/Onderwijsspiegel%202023.pdf

[118] OESO (2008). *Improving School Leadership*. Volume 1: Policy and practice. Paris: OESO Publishing

[119] Devos et al. (1999).

[120] Vekeman, E., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020).

[121] Groenez, S., Juchtmans, G., Smet, M., & Stevens, C. (2015). *Analyse van het nieuwe financieringsmechanisme voor de werkingsmiddelen van scholen.* Steunpunt voor Onderwijsonderzoek. Brussel. https://lirias.kuleuven.be/retrieve/327735

[122] Devos, G., Vanblaere, B., & Bellemans, L. (2018).

[123] Devos, G. (2014). Bestuurlijke schaalvergroting: opportuniteit of bureaucratische valkuil? *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid, 3*, 37-46.

[124] Devos, 2008; Honingh et al., 2020.

making and cooperation within school boards that appear to be important (e.g. a clear vision and goals with regard to student performance, effective data use, accountability and evaluation, a good collaborative relationship). It is striking that these characteristics show strong similarities with the characteristics of effective schools (e.g. the focus on student performance, high expectations with regard to students, use of data as a function of student performance)[125] or the carriers of the policy-making capacity of schools (e.g. goal-oriented communication, joint goal-orientedness).[126] This is not surprising, because both ultimately point to the organisation of good education.

In this context, Honingh and colleagues note that several studies state that school boards are expected to meet similar requirements as school leaders, with the reasoning being that they thereby indirectly contribute to the quality of education.[127] Although this approach seems plausible, there is currently insufficient solid scientific basis to state it that way. In Flanders, for example, it was previously established that school boards should not necessarily be the supporting actors of the entire school policy and should be active in all policy areas. After all, school boards in Flanders as well as in other countries (see e.g. United Kingdom, United States, the Netherlands) are often composed of volunteers, who have little or no teaching experience. We have seen in previous research[128] that school boards are not always policymakers and are often most active in financial and material policy and least in pedagogical and care policy. School boards can also be more likely to supervise or even limit themselves to ratifying what the school management proposes.[129] Both policy-making and supervisory boards can have a good approach to ensuring the quality of governance. It is essential that a board ensures that the quality of education in the schools is realized by providing appropriate support to schools. In addition, we know that a good collaborative relationship between school leaders and the board is crucial and leads, among other things, to better follow-up of the students and a higher quality in the care policy.[130] The cooperation between the school boards and the school management is crucial in Flanders, precisely because the board members are often volunteers, and school directors are also closer to the practice. But even if the school board has professional administrators, the relationship between the board and school management is crucial. This is also evident from recent research into the functioning and stress of school principals in Flanders.[131]

Additional observations on the teacher shortage

In addition to the previous overview of relevant developments, a number of other points can be touched upon.

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[125] Reynolds, D., Sammons, P., de Fraine, B., van Damme, J., Townsend, T., Teddlie, C., & Stringfield, S. (2014). Educational effectiveness research (EER): A state-of-the-art review. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 25*(2), 197–230; Ansyari, F., Groot, W. and De Witte, K. (2020). Tracking the process of data use professional development interventions for instructional improvement: A systematic literature review. *Educational Research Review*, *31*, 100362. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100362

[126] Van Petegem, P., Mahieu, P., Thu Dang, K., Devos, G., & Warmoes, V. (2006). *Beleidsvoerend vermogen van Vlaamse basis- en secundaire scholen: samenvatting van de onderzoeksresultaten en de aanbevelingen*. Brussel: Vlaams ministerie van onderwijs en vorming.

[127] Honingh et al. (2020).

[128] Rekenhof (2019); Devos et al. (1999).

[129] Devos et al. (1999).

[130] Rekenhof (2019).

[131] Devos et al. (2018).

The teacher shortage does not affect schools equally.

There are relatively large differences between schools in the extent to which they are confronted with the teacher shortage. On the one hand, schools that score high on GOK indicators (a set of criteria developed to indicate vulnerability of the pupils) seem more vulnerable to the teacher shortage. Schools that have many children with SES characteristics, such as a low-skilled mother or another home language, have more vacancies that remain unfilled. This suggests that, on average, teachers are less attracted to schools with more SES students. The teacher shortage hits schools with many vulnerable students the hardest. In addition, the proportion of unfilled vacancies is also correlated with observed (e.g., infrastructure) and unobserved (e.g., organisational culture) characteristics of school quality.[132]

This is in line with an important finding from the TALIS 2018 study. Schools with more vulnerable pupils, poor concentration schools for example, have fewer experienced teachers on average.[133] Figure 1 shows that this problem is much more prevalent in Flanders than in other countries. The social segregation of the school landscape is reflected and exacerbated by the differences in teacher allocation. The teacher shortage seems to be exacerbating this trend, as experienced teachers are given more choices and migrate to schools with a more affluent student population or a socioeconomic and socio-cultural environment that is perceived as more comfortable. More vulnerable schools not only find it more difficult to find teachers, but also recruit more starting and inexperienced teachers, while they are the ones who need teachers with a stronger experience.[134] In this way, the teacher shortage reinforces already existing inequalities in education.

On the other hand, it is also clear that schools with a clear, attractive, future-oriented pedagogical project, strong leadership and good administrative capacity[135] are more successful in attracting well-motivated and strong teachers. In case of scarcity, teachers have the opportunity to choose a school and workplace and then, in a negative sense, segregation and deprivation on the one hand and, in a positive sense, the policy power and perceived quality on the other hand work in that choice process.

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[132] De Witte, K. & Gambi, L. (2023).

[133] Siongers, J., Spruyt, B., Van Droogenbroeck, F. & Kavadias, D. (2021). *TALIS 2018 Vlaanderen – Verdiepend rapport diversiteit*. Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

[134] De Witte, K., De Cort, W. en Gambi, L. (2023). *Evidence-based Solutions to Teacher Shortages*. EENEE-NESET Analytical Report. European Commission. https://nesetweb.eu/en/resources/library/tackling-teacher-shortages/

[135] In dit rapport verkiezen we de term 'bestuurlijke capaciteit' boven het gangbare begrip 'beleidsvoerend vermogen' omdat het eerder gaat om goed bestuur dan goed beleid.
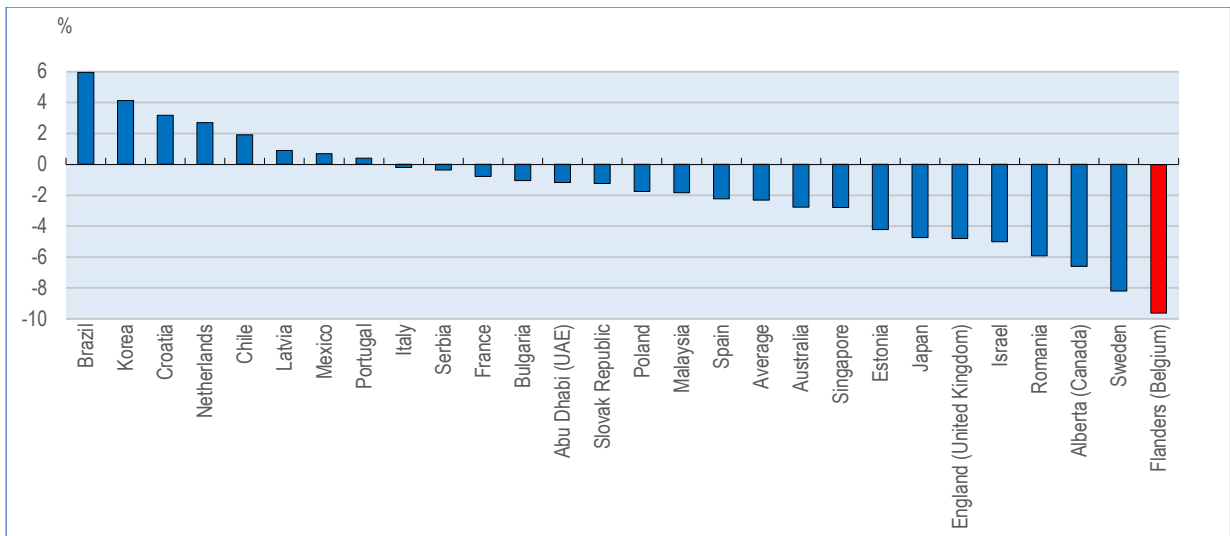
Figure 1. Relative representation of experienced teachers in schools with many pupils in disadvantaged situations[136]

The impact of the COVID pandemic

It is clear that the COVID pandemic, school closures, the sudden transition to distance learning and the general disruption of the educational process and school life have had a very strong impact not only on students and families, but also on teachers and school leaders. Not only did some teachers look for other professional challenges, but the stress and illness of teachers themselves also took a heavy toll.[137] School closures, interruptions to the educational process and distance learning have put teachers' professional routines to the test, which has undoubtedly contributed to reduced levels of *self-efficacy* and self-confidence. It is very difficult to estimate to what extent all this has caused the current teacher shortage, but it is very likely that there has been an effect.

The impact of the teacher shortage on the quality of education and the right to education

As already mentioned, it is evident that the teacher shortage has a negative impact on learning performance. Kristof De Witte and his team have quantified this effect as part of their research into the evolution of learning performance after the covid pandemic.[138] Their research at primary schools affiliated with Catholic Education Flanders points to a strong correlation between the teacher shortage and the results on the tests. Even after eliminating pupil and school characteristics, one percentage point increase in unfilled vacancies (as a percentage of the total number of FTE teachers in the schools) correlates with a decrease of -0.04 SD in Dutch, and -0.05 SD in mathematics. In other words, when the average primary school with 13 teachers cannot fill a vacancy, this leads to a learning delay that is the equivalent of 2.1 weeks of teaching for Dutch and 2.6 weeks of teaching for mathematics. This finding suggests that the teacher shortage may exacerbate the already many challenges facing education systems. Similar results are also

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[136] Figure based on TALIS 2018 data

[137] Pressley, T. (2021). Factors contributing to teacher burnout during COVID-19. *Educational Researcher*, 50(5), 325–327. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211004138

[138] De Witte, K. & Gambi, L. (2023).

observed at the age of 15, where the presence of a teacher shortage in a school correlates negatively with students' math, language, and science scores.[139] With a higher number of unfilled vacancies at a school, the educational results of pupils decrease.

This negative impact of the teacher shortage on the quality of education is not only due to the reduced instruction time. Interruptions in school and classroom routines also reduce the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes. Often the substitute teacher is less experienced, still in training and not qualified. Substitutes also change more often and thus ensure less continuity.

Because the teacher shortage affects not only the provision of education but also the quality of education, it also poses a threat to the right to education.[140] This fundamental right, which can be found in various sources of law, can only be meaningfully implemented if it is possible to recruit a sufficient number of qualified staff. The quality of education and the availability of sufficient and competent teachers are closely related.

[139] De Witte, K. & Iterbeke, K. (2022).

[140] Timbermont, E. (2023). Het recht op onderwijs in tijden van een lerarentekort: quo vadis? *Tijd voor Mensenrechten.* https://tijd.mensenrechten.be/2023/09/27/het-recht-op-onderwijs-in-tijden-van-een-lerarentekort-quo-vadis/

Chapter 3. The professionalism of teachers in evolution

Following the empirical analysis of the situation of teachers and school leaders in Flanders today, this chapter elaborates on the changes facing the teaching profession in a more qualitative way. It then contains a concise synthesis of what we consider to be the most important aspects of teacher professionalism.

The choice for the teaching profession remains essentially a positive choice.

Why do many people still choose the teaching profession and what motivates them in their choice for education.[141] In 2022, researchers from KU Leuven led by Ellen Claes conducted research into this.[142]
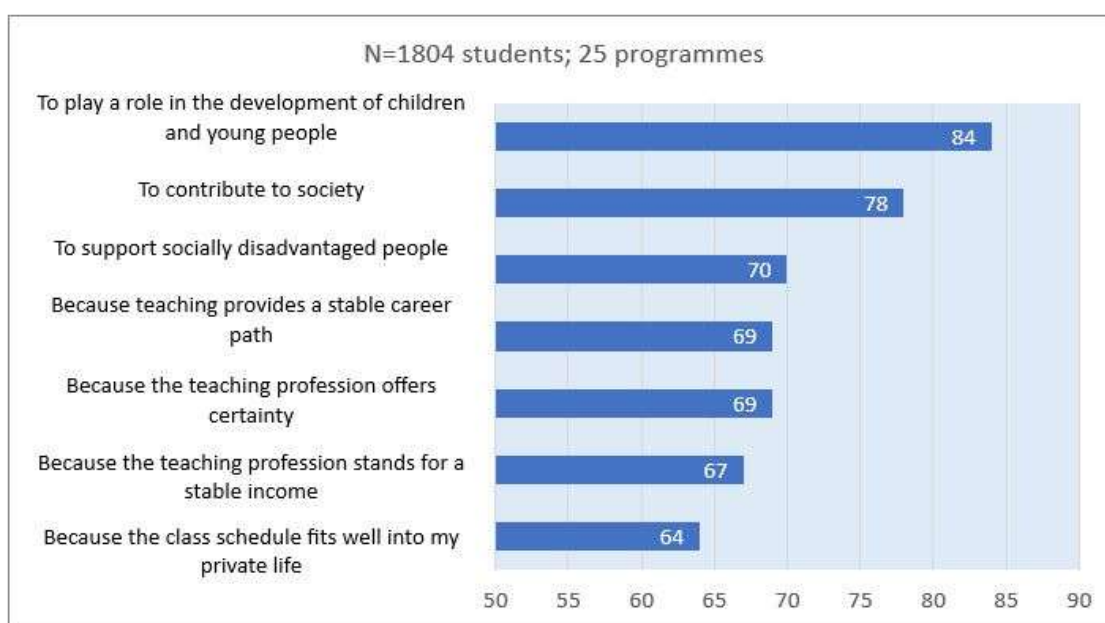
Figure 6. Why do young people want to become teachers?

For this study, 1,804 first-year students were surveyed, who had just enrolled in 25 teacher training programmes across the country (both educational bachelors and educational masters). A Likert scale was used for the survey, on which students could indicate why they want to become a

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[141] What follows is mainly based on: Agirdag O., Claes E., De Laet T., De Witte K., Godderis L., Henkens B., Kelchtermans G., Masschelein J., Peters E., Pollefeyt D., Van Ruyskensvelde S., Vanassche E., Willems K. (2023). *De toekomst van het leraarschap (m/v/x): Een perspectief voorbij de tekorten*. Metaforum visietekst 21, 1-21. Leuven: Werkgroep Metaforum.

[142] Claes, E., Agirdag, O., Isac, M.M., Dursun, H. & Vandevelde, E. (2022). *Civic and intercultural competences of pre-service teachers in a longitudinal* perspective. [Questionnaire]; Claes, E., Agirdag, O., Dursun, H. & Vandevelde, E. (2022). *Civic and intercultural competences of pre-service teachers in a longitudinal perspective*. [Dataset].

teacher. The scores below have been rescaled to a score from 0 to 100 and ranked from the most to the least important reason.

Two aspects stand out in the results of this study. Firstly, the most common reason for opting for teacher training is the role that candidate teachers want to play in the development of future generations (item 1). In doing so, they want to make a meaningful contribution to society (item 2) and support socially weaker groups (item 3). Anyone who ignores the social role of the teacher may be ignoring one of the most important motives people choose the teaching profession. Candidate teachers want to make a meaningful contribution on both an individual and societal level, or in other words, they want to make a difference. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether social and institutional developments respect or hinder the intrinsic motivation of (candidate) teachers (see below). An education system that falls short of its social mission may be less attractive to (future) teachers. This is also the case for projects of schools that do not facilitate that kind of job assignment.

Secondly, we see that all the factors studied play a significant role: none of the items that candidate teachers could choose scored lower than 50 (the theoretical midpoint of the scale). This means that a stable career, a good salary and schedules that can be combined with private life are also important. In other words, the sometimes-romanticized image of the teacher (for whom wages and working conditions are supposedly unimportant) does not correspond to reality (see also the recent report of the European Commission[143] on this subject). This means that measures to improve teachers' working conditions, such as the guarantee of competitive remuneration, can play an important role in making the teaching profession more attractive. At the same time, these findings also call for caution: if, for example, the tenure of teachers is called into question, the alternative must offer a motivated and well-functioning teacher at least as much – and therefore no less – protection and stability.

In short, this report argues for the recognition of and respect for the social role and motivations of (candidate) teachers, as well as for ensuring attractive, stable working conditions with adequate remuneration.[144] Policy measures aimed at making the teaching profession more attractive ideally take these findings into account and should strive for a balance between the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that play a role in the choice for (= inflow) and the continued choice for (= outflow) education. The attrition is an equally crucial part of the problem of the teacher shortage that should not be neglected. Only by paying proportionate attention to teachers' motivations for entering and staying in the profession, as well as to the practical conditions in which the profession is practiced, can the teacher shortage be tackled in an effective way and quality education for future generations can be guaranteed.

The social environment is changing.

The motivation to both become and remain a teacher, and the complexity of being a teacher must be understood within a changing social and institutional context. There are several factors and developments that influence the role and meaning of teaching. Crucially, these tendencies can undermine intrinsic motivation – the main motivation to become a teacher. The three main determinants of intrinsic motivation[145] are autonomy (the degree of control or self-direction a

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[143] De Witte, K., De Cort, W. en Gambi, L. (2023).

[144] See Chapter 11

[145] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68.

person has in his or her actions), competence (the sense of competence or skill in an job assignment or task), and connectedness (the feeling of belonging). In this context, we have identified five societal trends (challenges) that we believe potentially pose a fundamental threat to this intrinsic motivation: standardization, perception, diversity, digitalization, and juridification.

Standardization

A first important trend that characterizes education policy today is increasing standardization. In this respect, Flemish education policy also follows international trends. Examples of such policies and reforms include the increasing use and impact of standardized and central tests, the introduction of attainment targets/minimum targets as a standard and the introduction of (standardized) occupational profiles. Standards are necessary and useful, especially for beginning teachers. They provide a clear framework and guidelines, allowing these teachers to teach with confidence and consistency. In addition, standards provide common ground and language, which is essential for communicating and collaborating effectively with peers and other education professionals. But as outlined earlier, most teachers choose the profession because of their motivation to make a meaningful contribution to society and thus make a difference in society. The question is how the motivation behind, and the complexity of teaching relate to the trend towards (far-reaching) standardization.

Although standardization is mainly driven by the concern to improve the quality of education, this tendency can have the unintended consequence of putting pressure on the professional autonomy of the (experienced) teacher. After all, professionalism is not about standardized action, but about the ability to act adequately in a certain (and difficult to predict) situation and context (see above). Teachers show the knowledge, insight and empathy needed for the situation and are able to tailor their actions to the concrete situation and context.[146] In other words, through their training and experience, professionals have built up a rich knowledge base that enables them to make the right decisions and take the right actions, given the situation. In doing so, what is right (the 'how' of the action) must always be evaluated in relation to the predetermined goals (the 'why' of that action). As professionals, therefore, teachers should also be given autonomy to do so. Given the specific context that partly determines the complexity of the teaching profession, the professional does not act according to a script or on the basis of general standards. That is precisely why being a good teacher also requires a strong education.

Autonomy is one of the most determining factors driving intrinsic motivation and the main driver for choosing the teaching profession. Standardization can therefore never or should never reduce the teaching profession to 'band work', to a standardized and interchangeable part of a production process, because this ignores the complexity of the teaching profession and the deep-rooted motivation of the teachers. On the other hand, the autonomy of the teacher is not absolute. Teachers must shape their actions within the available framework, in relation to their school team, other colleagues, the pedagogical project of the school, the attainment targets to be achieved, and so on.

While research on effectiveness is particularly important in education, the use of evidence-informed methods should not lead the teacher to follow only the steps, as prescribed by experts, so that the teacher is no longer expected to judge and act from his/her own theoretical and practical insights (or assumes that such judgment is not part of his/her professionalism).

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[146] See Agirdag, O., Aesaert, K., & Simons, M. (2020). Module 9 Kwaliteit. In J. Elen & A. Thys (Eds.) *Leren in maatschappelijk betrokken onderwijs (2e editie)*, 361-399. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Professionalism and evidence-informed action are therefore not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the professional must be informed about the scientific state of affairs (through initial training, but also through continuous professionalisation) within the sociology of education, educational economics, pedagogy, cognitive psychology, educational history and other scientific (sub)disciplines. Based on their professionalism, teachers must be given the space and confidence to carefully interpret concrete practical situations, to reflectively test the scientific theory (the 'evidence') against their own practice, to enter into dialogue with other professionals and stakeholders and ultimately to make a well-considered judgment as the basis for their own actions. After all, there is no indisputable scientific basis for concluding that there is one optimal action or judgment. In this sense, the teaching profession is characterized by an intrinsic or structural vulnerability.[147] Many of the factors that determine the final course of teaching-learning processes are beyond the control of teachers. Teachers will have to judge and act again and again in concrete situations, based on their expertise and commitment as professionals. The vulnerability of the profession should not be problematized, but rather embraced: after all, it can form the basis for the appreciation of the education professional and for creating space in which the teacher can learn, experiment and reflect within a professional learning community.

Imaging

The negative image of the reality of education is therefore the second social trend that we observe. If teachers indicate that they choose the profession mainly to make a meaningful contribution to society, but if at the same time the popular image suggests that education is not a place where that ambition can be realized, then it is not surprising that teachers ultimately choose other professional paths.[148] Moreover, the sense of competence is an important determinant of teachers' intrinsic motivation. The negative image threatens to undermine that sense, resulting in demotivation.

However, the negative image does not detract from the fact that there are actual problems, the consequences of which come to the surface, for example, through declining scores on standardized tests. Studies provide insight into underlying problems, such as the workability in education and the declining appreciation. According to a survey by the Social and Economic Council of Flanders, the workability of the teaching profession has fallen from 60% in 2007 to 46% in 2019.[149] Causes include work stress and a poorer work-life balance. Appreciation for the profession and confidence in education as an institution are decreasing. There are also very important challenges when it comes to school infrastructure, where adequate infrastructure is crucial to achieve good learning conditions.

At the same time, the vicious circle of negative perception is not very productive, and more attention should be paid to the ambitions of teachers, to the warm reality in schools, and to the daily great performances of teachers, principals and schools. For example, research by IDEWE shows that teachers are actually happier than the average Flemish employee.[150] The reason for this is that they experience more autonomy and development opportunities than the average Flemish employee. The social support of colleagues and managers, in short, the community of

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[147] Kelchtermans, G. (2023). *Leraar zijn, leraar worden.* Antwerpen: Pelckmans.

[148] Ewing, L. A., Ewing, M., & Cooper, H. (2021). From bad to worse: The negative and deteriorating portrayal of teachers on screen. *Teachers and Teaching, 27*(6), 506-519.

[149] SERV (2020). *Rapport Werkbaarheidsprofiel onderwijssector 2019. Sectorale analyse op de Vlaamse werkbaarheidsmonitor 2004-2019*. Zie ook de paragraaf Workability of the job

[150] Godderis, L. et al. (2021). *Gezondheidsrapport Belgische werknemers*. IDEWE.

people who 'make' the school context and practice, is also important in this. The most recent TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) survey[151] of 2018 shows that Flemish teachers are very satisfied with their job and the school where they work. For example, an average of 92.5% of Flemish teachers in primary education and 92.9% in the first stage of secondary education indicate that they are generally satisfied with their job. This is not only high, but also significantly higher than in other European countries. However, these positive findings don't make headlines, even though they probably deserve to.

Even the teacher shortage may deserve some positive attention. After all, the shortage is partly the result of the fact that teachers are so competent and widely deployable that they are often plucked away by other economic sectors. A teacher's diploma is in demand on the labour market, where the war on talent has not yet been fought. This fact, as well as the fact that education also seems to be attractive to career changers from other sectors, is almost completely ignored by the Flemish media, which pay disproportionate attention to early departure from education and prestige and quality decline. The positive image is not only the responsibility of the media, but also of the school management, the students, the parents and, last but not least, the teachers themselves.

Diversity

Our society has become increasingly diverse in recent decades, especially in terms of ethno-cultural background. The consequences of this are also reflected in the pupil population: pupils are diverse in terms of national origin, philosophical beliefs and home language. This trend is closely linked to the teacher shortage, as the shortage is particularly noticeable in schools in urban areas that are characterized by high student diversity. However, the problem does not lie in the increased or increasing diversity *as such*, but in the way we deal with it in practice and policy. As indicated earlier, social connectedness is one of the three determining factors for intrinsic motivation and the main motivation for choosing the teaching profession. Many people choose the teaching profession precisely to make a contribution to society. Diversity and togetherness can go hand in hand, but then the diversity within our society must be used optimally.

Firstly, it is striking that – despite an increasing diversity in the pupil population – the share of teachers with a non-European background is very limited in Flanders. Only 2.5% of teachers have a non-European migration background, while about a third of Flemish pupils have a non-European background.[152] In cities such as Ghent and Antwerp, a majority of pupils even have a non-European background. This discrepancy is remarkable to say the least and suggests that a large potential group of teachers is not being addressed. This underrepresentation of ethno-cultural minority groups in the teaching profession cannot be seen in isolation from the broader issue of (in)equality of opportunity in education: pupils from ethno-cultural minorities are less likely to enter higher education and therefore less likely to end up in higher education. In addition, potential teachers with a migrant background often face barriers that discourage them from choosing the teaching profession. An example of this is the de facto headscarf ban, as a result of the ban on wearing religious symbols or school-specific dress codes, which applies in most Flemish schools. This headscarf ban discourages an important group of potential teachers,

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[151] Van Droogenbroeck, F., Lemblé, H., Bongaerts, B., Spruyt, B., Siongers, J., & Kavadias, D. (2019). *TALIS 2018 Vlaanderen - Volume I.* Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

[152] Departement Onderwijs (2021). *Nulmeting herkomst leerkrachten in het Vlaamse onderwijs.* https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/nulmeting-herkomst-leerkrachten-in-het-vlaamse-onderwijs. Zie ook de paragraaf Characteristics of the teacher population in dit rapport

not only from choosing the teaching profession, but already makes itself felt during and just after the training. This can be seen in the lack of traineeships for trainee teachers with headscarves and in finding a job as a teacher. In addition, a lack of confidence in the linguistic abilities of pupils with a non-European background, both from society and from themselves, can discourage pupils with a migrant background from embarking on an educational career.[153] The shortage of teachers from ethno-cultural minority groups not only contributes to the overall teacher shortage, but also hinders a balanced representation of diverse society in education. A diverse group of teachers can help create a more inclusive learning environment, where pupils feel better recognized and understood, and can provide the necessary role models for the pupils.[154] Removing barriers experienced by teachers with a migrant background and explicitly valorising the multilingual potential of these teachers in education[155] can make it possible, both in the short and long term, to tap into the great potential of teachers with a diverse background.

Secondly, it is important to recognize that the increase in diversity in schools increases the complexity of teaching. The TALIS 2018 survey[156] shows that only 17% of Flemish teachers feel well prepared to deal with cultural and linguistic diversity. This low percentage is remarkable, especially when compared to the preparation of teachers for other aspects of their work, such as classroom management (for which 81% feel well prepared), teaching methodology (76%) and ICT use (64%). This is not surprising, given the limited attention paid by Flemish teacher training programs to dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity.[157] But it is worrying, as almost all teachers are increasingly confronted with diversity in their classrooms. The feeling of being underprepared may therefore contribute to the lower satisfaction reported by teachers in schools with a more diverse student population. This, in turn, can lead to increased workload, stress and a feeling of incompetence, which in turn results in a higher dropout rate of teachers in such schools. Focusing on the professionalisation and support of teachers in the field of inclusion and diversity in initial training and in the context of lifelong learning can therefore be an important means of reducing teacher dropout.

Thirdly, it is important to look at the role of pedagogical projects within the Flemish education system. The majority of schools in Flanders are free schools, which are often founded by a religious community. Catholic schools are the vast majority in this. However, demographic changes in society in general and a growing share in society of people with different philosophical beliefs have not led to more inclusive pedagogical projects by schools in a proportionate way. Faced with the social reality of increasing diversity, we see a policy paradox that seems to honour a 'colourless' approach.[158] In this complex field of opportunities and challenges, it is important that education policy and practice anticipate the increasing diversity in society. This can be done, among other things, through pedagogical projects of schools that combine a strong (own) identity

[153] Agirdag, O. (2020). *Onderwijs in een gekleurde samenleving*. Antwerpen: EPO.

[154] Dee, T. S. (2004). Teachers, race, and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *Review of Economics and Statistics, 86*(1), 195-210. https://doi.org/10.1162/003465304323023750

[155] Een bestaand voorbeeld hiervan zijn Oekraïense leraren die lesgeven in het Oekraïens.

[156] Van Droogenbroeck, F. et al. (2019).

[157] Dursun, H., Claes, E., & Agirdag, O. (2023). Coursework, field-based teaching practices, and multicultural experiences: Analyzing the determinants of preservice teachers' ethnocultural diversity knowledge. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 126*, 104077. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104077

[158] Pollefeyt, D., & Richards, M. (2020). Catholic dialogue schools: Enhancing Catholic school identity in contemporary contexts of religious pluralisation and social and individual secularisation. *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, 96*(1), 77-113.

with solidarity and openness to various identities in society.[159] Diversity cannot be seen in isolation from imaging: a lack of diversity leads to a lack of role models, which in turn maintains or can even reinforce the lack of diversity in the influx.

Finally, the meaning of 'diversity' is broader than the classical attention to ethno-cultural origin. The gender composition of the teaching profession is also far from reflecting society. In 2021-2022, less than 36% of full-time equivalents in secondary education were male; in primary education, the figure was as low as 13%. This points to a significant underrepresentation of men in education, especially given the fact that in Flanders, 52% of the working population was male in 2022. Even more worryingly, the gender gap is even greater among younger teachers.

Digitalization

Digitalization in education has undergone enormous development in recent years. This trend was further strengthened by the corona pandemic and also structurally encouraged and supported through the Digisprong.[160] Digitalization offers many opportunities and can create additional teaching options for the teacher. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic has also made it clear that ill-considered digitalization, such as a rapid switch to online forms of education, can also pose a threat to the quality of education and put pressure on the pursuit of equal opportunities.

Yet all these technological developments have not reduced the need for skilled teachers, on the contrary. Although technological development has a significant impact on education and computers play a valuable role in the learning process, they cannot completely replace teachers. In that respect, the experiences during and with the corona pandemic have just made us realize what educational technology cannot do. First, computers can't simply replace teachers' crucial human interaction and emotional intelligence. Teachers have the ability to understand and address the social, emotional, and academic needs of pupils. They can show empathy, provide encouragement, and teach tailored to each pupil's individual needs. Secondly, a teacher's pedagogical expertise is essential. After all, they have the ability to translate complex concepts to the pupils in an understandable way, to answer questions and guide discussions. Despite their artificial intelligence, computers lack the nuance and flexibility that complex educational realities require. Thirdly, the teacher's role as a guide and role model is irreplaceable. Teachers motivate, inspire, and influence pupils in ways that go beyond the purely academic, and that's something a computer can't easily match. While technology can play an important supporting role, it will never be able to replace the essential human factor in education.

Fourthly – and in line with what we wrote above about standardization – educational practice inevitably rests on the ability of the professional teacher to judge what is desirable in concrete situations. This judgement is rooted on the one hand in the expertise of the teacher, but on the other hand also in the *ethical* commitment towards the pupils entrusted to his or her care. This concern means that teachers feel responsible for supporting the pupils in shaping their own life

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[159] See, for example, the subject 'interfaith dialogue' in Community Education and the Catholic Dialogue School of Catholic Education.

[160] Cone, L., Brøgger, K., Berghmans, M., Decuypere, M., ... & Vanermen, L. (2022). Pandemic Acceleration: Covid-19 and the emergency digitalization of European education. *European Educational Research Journal, 21*(5), 845-868.

project as a unique person. This ethical, personal commitment cannot be operationalised via algorithms, but requires the relevant judgement of the professional.[161]

Empirical research shows the limitations of digitalization: studies show that fully digital/online education does not lead to significantly better learning outcomes than face-to-face education.[162] *Blended* learning – a combination of online education and face-to-face education – can have great added value. For example, intelligent tutoring systems offer possibilities, among other things, to alleviate the consequences of the acute teacher shortage and to prevent students from studying without meaningful job assignments, receiving no instruction, or receiving little activating instruction by following a recorded lesson.[163] The benefits of digitalization cannot be reaped automatically simply by offering digital tools. It is particularly important that ICT-driven teaching materials are developed in a well-thought-out way and have an adaptive character that offers targeted feedback and the possibility of repeating instructions.

Digitalization therefore offers many new opportunities for schools and teachers that can enrich their professional and autonomous actions. At the same time, it increases the complexity of teaching, and digitalization further challenges the professionalism of teachers. Teachers must be given the space and support to make a good integration of digital tools into their classroom practice, in a way that benefits the teaching and learning process in their own concrete context. In an ill-conceived digitalization, there is again the danger of far-reaching standardization that reduces the scope for the teacher's professional autonomy and sense of competence.

Juridification

One of the reasons given by teachers for leaving the profession is the increased administrative burden.[164] Anyone who wants to tackle the administrative burden in education quickly meets the broad spectre of juridification. This term is used as a catch-all term for the various processes related to the (alleged or not) increasing regulations and legal procedures in education. We will not go into the possible causes here, but we do want to put the 'problem' in the right context.

First, we have to ask ourselves whether juridification is merely a 'problem'. Can we not also interpret this trend positively, as an increase in the professional level of education, as a strengthening of parents' responsibility, as a fight against arbitrariness, as a provision of legal certainty? It is obvious that an educational institution has a number of rules and principles that they must adhere to. Given that a decision such as an exclusion to a certain study programme can have far-reaching consequences for a student, it goes without saying that the class council does not take a decision like that lightly. The class council must be able to justify its decision. Accountability and options for appeal are perfectly legitimate in a situation where legal decisions are made. You want to avoid abuse, for example, where the class council is too quick to issue an exclusion from all the study programmes offered by the school, even without being able to

[161] See i.e. Biesta, G. (2013). *The beautiful risk of education*. Paradigm Publishers; Simons, M. & Masschelein, J. (2017). *De leerling centraal in het Onderwijs? Grenzen van personalisering*. Leuven: Acco.
[162] Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., & Baki, M. (2013). The effectiveness of online and blended learning: A meta-analysis of the empirical literature. *Teachers College Record, 115*(3), 1-47.
[163] Iterbeke, K., De Witte, K., Declercq, K., & Schelfhout, W. (2020). The effect of ability matching and differentiated instruction in financial literacy education. Evidence from two randomised control trials. *Economics of Education Review*, 78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.101949
[164] Spruyt, B., Van Droogenbroeck, F., Siongers, J., & Kavadias, D. (2023). Het lerarentekort kritisch bekeken vanuit internationaal vergelijkend perspectief. *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, 19-27.

demonstrate that this pupil would not be able to cope with certain courses. In similar situations, it is a good thing that decisions can be challenged and rectified.

The data show that the core of juridification (the effective 'contestation' of class council decisions) has a rather limited occurrence, and that the annulment of such decisions is even more limited. For the majority of schools, which work in good faith within the legal framework, the fear of litigation is therefore unjustified. Over the past ten years, the number of pupils who actually go to court (the Council of State is competent for this) has been between 6 (in 2018-2019) and 25 (in 2017-2018). These rather moderate figures are in stark contrast to the fears of teachers and principals. We see a role for management and boards of directors in this. Instead, they should take on the role of protecting teachers from that fear, by expressing their confidence rather than encouraging teachers to put as much as possible on paper 'just in case'. The Council of State assumes a trust in the professionalism of the teacher (which means that the pupil bears the burden to prove the opposite with concrete data). In the current parliamentary period, this legal principle has also been enshrined in a decree. If class councils and teachers do their job in a professional manner, they may assume that this should suffice in a legal audit. And boards need to give that message as well.

Teachers must have confidence in their own professional actions and principals and schools in those of their teachers. Any teacher who works conscientiously keeps pupil-related information anyway. Each school uses a pupil tracking system (LVS) in which this information can be stored. This data can be used to prove that a pupil has been correctly informed, or that the school has fulfilled its obligations. This information doesn't have to be comprehensive, but it does need to be the right information. Teachers can learn to report efficiently and purposefully. This will reduce the administrative burden: short notes are sufficient and the LVS can facilitate this instead of inviting the teacher to be as complete as possible. Tools such as the LVS or Smartschool were developed to support teachers. In essence, they are well-intentioned, but gradually they were increasingly perceived as an administrative burden that come on top of the actual task of the teacher. Reduce such tools to their essence, so that they can be reused to support teachers in what they want to do.

If an internal or external appeal leads to the annulment of the class council's decision, this does not automatically imply a lack of professionalism on the part of the class council and/or teacher. An annulment does not necessarily mean that the decision was wrong, sometimes that decision just needs to be better motivated. If destruction does take place on substantive grounds, then the appropriate response is to look at the processes with an appropriate critical eye, without cramping. An appeal procedure can also have a signalling function as a quality control and thus generate a positive effect.

If the evidence provided in the context of a specific dispute turns out to be insufficient, it seems appropriate to analyse the internal processes with a critical eye rather than, for example, questioning the professionalism of the class council and/or the teacher. After all, class councils and teachers may assume that, if they do their job in a professional manner, this should suffice in the event of a dispute. Such a view must also be supported by the management boards and is also endorsed by the regulator (cf. presumption of expertise and establishment of a fund to cover certain legal costs).

The changing professionalism of teachers

Competences

The teacher is, of course, crucial for quality education for our children and young people.[165] However, the role, function and position of the teacher are also the subject of continuous social debate. Both in Flanders and internationally, there are initiatives to set expectations with regard to teachers in order to guarantee the quality of teachers.[166] In Flanders, for example, we now have the professional profile for teachers, which also includes basic competences derived from it that form guidelines for teacher training to produce qualified novice teachers. This professional profile and the basic competences illustrate the complexity of the teaching profession represented in ten type functions that address the role of the teacher in the classroom, in the school and in society.[167]

At the same time, we also note that due to social evolutions, teachers are constantly faced with new expectations that entail specific tasks and responsibilities. In a previous Flemish study, experts agreed that the emphasis will increasingly be placed on competencies within the current teacher profile that make it possible for the teacher to:
1. give students more responsibility in their learning and development processes,
2. further professionalise themselves, with an emphasis on didactic knowledge and skills,
3. provide better socio-emotional guidance to pupils at school,
4. promote cooperation between pupils, with fellow teachers, parents and management,
5. make ICT an integral part of the pupil's classroom practice and
6. to bridge the gap between the classroom and the world outside.[168]

Also, within the VLOR, an exercise was recently carried out on the unique nature of the teaching profession in which a group of teachers themselves put forward five building blocks as fundamental dimensions of the teaching profession:
1. expertise
2. a heart for children and young people,
3. commitment
4. autonomy and
5. connection.

These building blocks reflect the motivation of teachers and call for social appreciation of the teacher.[169]

Teachers themselves are usually willing to deal with these different expectations but indicate that this willingness is related to important preconditions such as support and leadership within the

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[165] Minea-Pic, A. et al. (2021)

[166] Rots, I. & Ruys, I. (2013). De identiteit van leraren. In: Vanderlinde, R., Rots, I., Tuytens, M., Rutten, K., Ruys, I., Soetaert, R. & Valcke, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Essays over de leraar en de toekomst van de lerarenopleiding*. Academia Press.

[167] https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=13942

[168] Sassenus, S., Boderé, A., Van Gasse, R. & Van Petegem, P. (2018). *De leraar van de 21ste eeuw: uitdagingen, verwachtingen en randvoorwaarden*. Gent: Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek.

[169] VLOR (2021). *Rapport cluster 1: 'Wat maakt het beroep van leraar uniek?' Project 'De leraar op school en in de samenleving'*. Brussel: Vlaamse Onderwijsraad.

school, available time, balance between autonomy and direction.[170] Teachers must also be able to develop the competence to deal with the many questions and expectations, not drown in them, and prioritize as needed.

Knowledge and craftsmanship

Pedagogical knowledge

There is an extensive scientific literature on the components of the teacher's professionalism. First of all, there is a strong cognitive component, knowledge. The distinction that Lee Shulman made years ago in different types of knowledge in the professionalism of teachers is still guiding today.[171] Among other forms, Shulman distinguished three key components:
1. "General pedagogical knowledge"
2. "Content knowledge"
3. "Pedagogical content knowledge"

This distinction is still useful to organize the knowledge component in the professionalism of teachers. The general pedagogical knowledge, independent of the subject-specific and didactic knowledge, is of course an important component.[172] It is the equivalent of medical knowledge among doctors or legal knowledge among lawyers. Teachers are pedagogical professionals and therefore master pedagogical knowledge.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to be concerned about the level of general pedagogical knowledge among teachers. From the TALIS survey, we know that teachers are facing serious gaps in their knowledge base.[173] They indicate that they do not have the necessary knowledge, for example, to work with pupils with special needs, to integrate technology into their classroom practice, to teach in highly diverse classrooms or in mixed-skill environments, etc. An OECD pilot study to evaluate the general pedagogical knowledge of teachers in five countries led to somewhat disappointing results.[174] Another recent OECD study in eight countries, based on analyses of classroom videos, found that the overall quality of instruction was rather low, perhaps because teachers did not have sufficient cognitive tools.[175] A meta-analysis of available research

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[170] Boderé, A., Van Gasse, R., Sassenus, S. & Van Petegem, P. (2018). *De leraar van de 21ste eeuw: een begeleider van zelfstandige leerprocessen, een teamwerker en didactisch expert?* Gent: Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek.

[171] Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, *57*(1), 1-23.

[172] Guerriero, S. (ed.) (2017). *Pedagogical Knowledge and the Changing Nature of the Teaching Profession*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264270695-en.

[173] OECD (2019). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en

[174] Sonmark, K., et al. (2017). "Understanding teachers' pedagogical knowledge: report on an international pilot study", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 159, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/43332ebd-en.

[175] OECD (2020b). *Global Teaching InSights: A Video Study of Teaching*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/20d6f36b-en, Figure 8.1.

has shown that teachers with highly developed general pedagogical knowledge showed a strong positive impact on the learning outcomes of their students.[176]

A module to test the general pedagogical knowledge of teachers is included in the TALIS 2024 survey, but unfortunately Flanders has decided not to participate in this module, which means that internationally comparable data on the level of general pedagogical knowledge of Flemish teachers will not be available.

In addition to general pedagogical knowledge, the subject-specific knowledge and didactic knowledge of teachers are also very important. 'Pedagogical Content Knowledge' (the translation of substantive professional knowledge into didactically powerful activities) is an answer to what Lee Shulman diagnoses as *'the missing paradigm'*, i.e. the linking of substantive knowledge and didactics.[177]Having knowledge of general didactic strategies without the necessary knowledge of how to apply them in the specific content area is insufficient for good education. This includes understanding what makes certain parts of the subject matter easy or difficult to learn, the optimal curricular order for instruction, and conveying the common misconceptions that students bring to class.

Teachers in Flanders are trained to have a good command of their subject area and to acquire the didactic knowledge to transfer these contents. Again, the data to estimate the quality of both types of knowledge among Flemish teachers are lacking. However, there is also some concern about this, both in the field of education and in society at large. A recent study by a newspaper of the share of teaching methodology in teacher training came to disturbing results.[178] Although questions can be asked about the quality and reliability of this research and a curriculum cannot be properly evaluated by only looking at the titles of course units, there are still plenty of reasons for concern. It seems that the teaching methodology component in the teacher training programme of some university colleges has become the victim of the increasing importance given to all kinds of other courses.

Evidence-informed expertise

In recent years, attempts have been made in many countries to make educational practice more evidence-based *or better* evidence-informed and thus to feed the pedagogical knowledge of teachers more strongly with scientific knowledge. The knowledge infrastructure has been and is being expanded, which is intended to transfer scientific research knowledge and translate it into

[176] Ulferts, H. (2019). "The relevance of general pedagogical knowledge for successful teaching: Systematic review and meta-analysis of the international evidence from primary to tertiary education", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 212, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ede8feb6-en.

[177] De Witte, K., Surma, T., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., De Cooman, R., Struyve, C., Decin, G., & Jans, N. (2023). *Aantrekken van leraren tot opleiden tot startklare professional. Hoe kunnen lerarenopleidingen en hoger onderwijsinstellingen bijdragen aan het verminderen van het lerarentekort?* https://associatie.kuleuven.be/onderwijs/lerarenopleiding; Depaepe, F., Verschaffel, L. & Kelchtermans, G. (2013). Pedagogical content knowledge: A systematic review of the way in which the concept has pervaded mathematics educational research. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 34, 12-25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.03.001

[178] https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/onderzoek-van-de-morgen-plaatst-vraagtekens-bij-hoe-onze-leraren-zijn-opgeleid-ik-ben-geschrokken-van-de-resultaten~b8a96f83/

the professional practice of teachers.[179] In Flanders, too, the Knowledge Centre Learning Point is currently being developed, which is intended to fulfil exactly that bridging function.[180] This is an extremely positive development.

Yet this is far from an easy task. Research shows that teachers are reluctant to consider research evidence as a useful source to fill their gaps in pedagogical knowledge, especially if it contrasts with their own experiential knowledge or the transferred professional knowledge. A 2017 EEF/NFER survey found that academic research had only a small to moderate impact on teachers' decision-making compared to other sources.[181] Important barriers in terms of competence and time to access scientific evidence prevent the use of scientific research by teachers.[182] Teachers often view research as far removed from the reality of the classroom.[183] It is often very difficult for them to properly place and interpret the results of scientific research, also because research data are often not stable and sometimes send contradictory signals to the educational field. It is therefore important that scientific research is translated into educational practice in the correct way that is accessible and useful for teachers.

Professional practical knowledge and craftsmanship

At the same time, it is illusory to think that one day the entire pedagogical knowledge will be filled by research and scientific evidence. Academic educational research is inadequate in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Like any profession, teaching is based on extensive practical knowledge acquired through experience and transferred within the profession. This practical knowledge is an essential and powerful component of the knowledge base of teachers' professionalism, and it is important to recognise and value it. Several knowledge systems are active in education, and it is not the case that all good things can be expected from knowledge based on scientific research.[184]

It is on the basis of this approach that Bulterman argues for a knowledge infrastructure that is not only based on scientific research, but also on action research and practical knowledge. She argues against the dichotomy between scientific knowledge and practical knowledge and for the recognition of the integration between the two in craftsmanship. By valuing the professionalism

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[179] OECD (2023b). *Who Really Cares about Using Education Research in Policy and Practice?: Developing a Culture of Research Engagement*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris https://doi.org/10.1787/bc641427-en.

[180] https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/kenniscentrum-leerpunt

[181] https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/evaluation/eef-evaluation-reports-and-research-papers/methodological-research-and-innovations/measuring-teachers-research-engagement

[182] Thomm, E., Sälzer, C., Prenzel, M. & Bauer, J. (2021). Predictors of teachers' appreciation of evidence-based practice and educational research findings. *Zeitschrift Fur Padagogische Psychologie*, *35*(2–3), 173–184. https://doi.org/10.1024/1010-0652/a000301; Schaik, P. van, Volman, M., Admiraal, W. & Schenke, W. (2018). Barriers and conditions for teachers' utilization of academic knowledge. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *90*, 50–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2018.05.003

[183] Willingham, D.T., and Daniel, D.B. (2021). Making Education Research Relevant: How researchers can give teachers more choices. *Education Next*, 21(2), 28-33. https://www.educationnext.org/making-education-research-relevant-how-researchers-can-give-teachers-more-choices/?s=09

[184] Van Damme, D., *The Power of Proofs*. Boston: Center for Curriculum Redesign. https://curriculumredesign.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Power-of-Proofs-CCR.pdf

of teachers, the meaning of the profession comes into its own; it also contributes to its social appreciation and thus reduces the teacher shortage.[185]

The teacher as an autonomous team player

Autonomy

Too often in the past, attempts have been made to answer questions about the quality of teachers by tightening control over teachers and prescribing to teachers what they should or should not do. With the best of intentions, a vast arsenal of prescriptive measures tell teachers what to do, including those based on scientific research. However, the teacher is not an executor of education designed by others, but a creative professional who makes choices to respond as effectively as possible to what pupils need and what the situation requires.[186] Prescriptive interventions de-professionalize the teacher and thus often achieve the opposite of what is intended.

That's why professional autonomy is so important. Like other professionals, we need to think of teachers as autonomous and knowledgeable professionals. Of course, they also make mistakes, but a professional learns from them.

Teachers are professionals and must proactively deal with the uncertainty and complexity that characterize their professional practice. This also implies a development perspective for the teacher.[187] The professionalism of the teacher is not something that is completed at a given moment but is situated in a permanent and sustainable competence development. Thus, it is of great importance to see the professionalisation of teachers in a continuum of professional growth and development.

Taking into account the complexity of the teaching profession and this professional continuum, we also believe that it is appropriate to focus on a thorough collaboration between different partners for the total professionalisation of teachers on the basis of the current professional profile. This means that teacher training programmes and the broad professional field (schools, pedagogical guidance services, etc.) all have an important role in this. This requires a better definition and build-up of the goals and competencies that can be pursued at each stage and by the different partners.[188] In this way, it can be clarified which basic competences need to be developed in the programme, which need to be developed and strengthened through practical experience (internships, mentoring) and which belong to the domain of the experienced teacher and the senior teacher.

Collaboration

However, teachers cannot make this process of professionalisation successful on their own. Autonomy does not mean that each teacher acts individually. There is a general consensus that

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[185] Bulterman, J. (2023). *Het lerarentekort. Pleidooi voor vakmanschap*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

[186] https://www.begeleidingstartendeleraren.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Een-beroepsbeeld-voor-de-leraar-4.pdf

[187] Hilton, G., Assunção Flores, M. & Niklasson, L. (2013). Teacher quality, professionalism and professional development: findings from a European project. *Teacher Development*, 17(4), 431-447.

[188] Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1013-1055.

the teacher as an individual is not only responsible for and able to cope with the many challenges, but that this is inevitably a team affair.[189] We therefore endorse the importance of the teacher as an autonomous professional surrounded by a multidisciplinary school team. Teachers should not feel individually isolated in the face of the multitude of challenges they face.

Research shows that efficient collaboration between teachers offers many benefits for their pupils.[190] For example, pupils state that they have more quality learning experiences and they come into contact with multiple personalities and teaching styles, which makes them more likely to connect with one of those teachers.[191] Collaborative teachers also create more opportunities to guide their pupils in a more targeted way and to interact more effectively with them. As a result, the students feel greater involvement and motivation and show less inappropriate or disruptive behaviour.

The TALIS study also refers to a number of advantages of a collaborative climate between teachers: for example, such a climate is said to be linked to higher academic performance among pupils, there [192] are fewer early school leavers, there is higher study motivation and less truancy.[193] Research also confirms that a more collaborative culture and a positive social school climate have a positive impact on teachers' mental health and reduce the likelihood of early exit from the teaching profession.[194]

From different areas of expertise and disciplines, a broader and more effective answer can be offered to the challenges posed by the current diverse and complex pupil population. Teachers can present the challenges and problems they face on a daily basis to their team and thus increase their own pedagogical tact and educational expertise. Collaboration therefore leads to a win-win situation. Teachers will feel better supported and equipped and will be able to focus more on their core task.

It must also be possible for schools to use a strategic-development-oriented personnel policy to put together and strengthen multidisciplinary teams in the school. Strategic-development-oriented personnel policy means that there is a 'balanced approach' within the school that takes into account on the one hand an alignment between the personnel policy and the strategic planning of the school (vision, mission, strategic goals) and on the other hand an alignment between the personnel policy and the specific needs of teachers (teams) within the school.[195] As a

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[189] Jensen, B. et al. (2016). *Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems*, National Center on Education and the Economy, https://www.ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BeyondPDWeb.pdf

[190] Vangrieken, K., Dochy, F., Raes, E. & Kyndt, E. (2015). Teacher collabouration: a systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 15, 17 – 40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.04.002

[191] Meirsschaut, M. & Ruys, I. (2018). Teamteaching: beweegredenen, randvoorwaarden en implicaties voor leerlingen, leraren en hun school. Onderzoeksrapport meervoudige gevalsstudie naar teamteaching in het Vlaamse basisonderwijs. Gent: Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek.

[192] Reynolds, K. J., Lee, E., Turner, I., Bromhead, D. & Subasic, E. (2017). How does school climate impact academic achievement? An examination of social identity processes. *School Psychology International*, 38(1), 78-97. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034316682295

[193] Keppens, G. & Spruyt, B. (2017). Towards a typology of occasional truancy: an operationalisation study of occasional truancy in secondary education in Flanders, *Research Papers in Education*, 32:1, 121-135. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2015.1136833

[194] Van Droogenbroeck, F., Spruyt, B. & Vanroelen, C. (2014). Burnout among senior teachers: Investigating the role of workload and interpersonal relationships at work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 43, 99–109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.07.005.

[195] Vekeman, E., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020).

result, schools can focus on putting together these multidisciplinary teams through the personnel practices 'recruitment and selection of teachers' and 'professional development', in which the team members complement and reinforce each other with their own further developed competencies in order to cope with the complexity and challenges that teachers are confronted with.

A rich, dynamic and demanding profession

All this makes the teaching profession a rich and dynamic profession, which is becoming increasingly complex. A profession that is characterized by a focus on the development of pupils and by reflection and development, which is collaborative in nature, in which teachers are collectively able to shape their work, and thereby relate to developments in society at large. It makes the teaching profession a demanding profession at the same time. A profession in which a teacher does not master all aspects and possibilities from the start, but a profession in which a teacher develops, makes choices and profiles himself, so that a variety of teachers is created who combine their expertise and strengths, in order to be able to offer pupils the best education within a school and a society. This image ensures that the profession is not a 'trap', but a profession that is rich in opportunities for deepening, specialisation, broadening and further growth. And a profession for which you are not ready after the initial teacher training, but in which you continue to develop, regularly take on new tasks, responsibilities and roles, in which you are occasionally a 'beginner' again and where a support structure is available that can help with the further professional growth appropriate to the career phase.

Part II. Foundations of the report

Chapter 4. Principles and guidelines of teacher and school policy

Building on the analysis in the previous chapter, this chapter first discusses the main principles that the Committee considers underpinning an effective teacher and school policy. These principles are then used to form the guidelines that are then elaborated later in the proposals and recommendations of the report. The principles and guidelines ensure ambition and coherence in the report. It is on the basis of these principles and guidelines that the concrete proposals that we elaborate further in the report can be tested.

Principles

The responsibility for education as a public good and the right of every pupil to quality education require a bold and sustainable teacher and school policy, aimed at a quantitatively sufficient number of teachers in the schools, at a high-quality vision of the professionalism of the teacher, at an attractive and motivating career perspective and an effective personnel policy at the level of schools and administrations.

Principle 1: Prioritise the quality of education

The fundamental mission of the education system, the organisations that are part of it and the professionals who work in it is to offer society education of the best possible quality, within the possibilities provided for by democratically decided funding and regulations. Education is a public service and is therefore primarily focused on the needs and interests of its clients, namely pupils and students, their families and society at large. The interests of the staff and the organisations in the education sector are subordinate to this. This implies that the quality of education takes precedence over other legitimate interests and considerations in education policy.

It is not easy to properly define the concept of educational quality. Learning outcomes and learning gains, as measured by international surveys, polling tests or the Flemish tests, are an important measure, but do not cover the full breadth and depth of the concept of educational quality. Not all domains of knowledge and competences are covered by such tests. Societal trends are also constantly recalibrating the vision of the functions and thus of the quality definition of education. The Committee has a broad but ambitious concept of quality. Good education sets high expectations for pupils, and society also expects a lot from education.

But it is characteristic of education that the quality of education itself is inextricably linked to the quality and professionalism of the teaching staff. It is a frequently used phrase, but it remains true: the quality of education cannot be higher than the quality of those who make it happen day in and day out. This applies first and foremost to the people 'on the front line', the teachers and the school leaders.

Principle 2: Professionalism as the core

A sustainable solution to the teacher shortage can only be achieved through more respect and trust in the teaching profession. Professionalism is the key concept here.

This report therefore focuses on strengthening the professionalism of teachers. Teaching must be strengthened, not so much by creating more attractive primary and secondary employment

conditions to increase the competitiveness of the profession in an already very tight labour market, but by defining the professional core of teaching in a contemporary way as the starting point of teacher policy.

The professionalism of the teacher is shaped by the knowledge and competencies of the teacher. These are essentially general pedagogical, subject-specific and didactic knowledge and competences. This implies that the continuous professionalisation of teachers mainly consists of the development of crystallization of knowledge and competences.

This report is based on a competency-driven vision on the professionalisation of teachers. The professional career of teachers is essentially a continuous process of competence development.

Principle 3: The shared responsibility for connected professionalism

It is tempting to look back and say that confidence in the teaching profession can only be restored by putting the status and autonomy of the teacher back at the centre. However, a contemporary vision of teaching can no longer be based on outdated notions of status and autonomy. 21st-century definitions of professionalism no longer focus on absolute autonomy but embed that professionalism in the functioning of professional teams and networks. This is certainly true for teachers as members of school teams, but also as members of wider professional communities. Teaching will still involve a relatively large degree of autonomy, but no longer in an isolated, individualized form. That's why we talk about connected professionalism.

Professionalism and the professional identity as a teacher are not mere qualities of an individual. Of course, the individual teacher has a great responsibility for professionalisation. To this end, he or she must take the necessary initiatives and commit to them throughout their career. That commitment may also be appreciated and sanctioned (positively or negatively). But professionalism only acquires meaning and value in the broader institutional context of the school and the education system, in the interpersonal and institutional networks in which education is made.

Principle 4: Strong leadership and governance

The first, obvious professional community for the teacher is the school. Strengthening the teaching profession is therefore not possible without strengthening the school, and therefore the school management and governance. Schools are not so much physical entities or administrative units but are first and foremost self-managing and learning communities of professionals. A school is not so much the place where the teacher performs his or her job autonomously but is above all the professional network in which he or she moves. This presupposes effective school teams, school leaders and school boards.

As a fourth principle, this report is therefore not only based on strong teaching, but also on strong schools, school leaders and school boards and thus for more far-reaching school autonomy. The teacher does not function alone, but as a member of a team and of an organisation, the school, with its leadership and governance.

Principle 5: A good balance between management, autonomy and accountability

In the course of recent history, divergent positions have been taken on how a complex system such as education should be managed. As in most Western European countries, under the influence of the so-called 'New Public Management', there has been a shift in Flanders from strong top-down regulation to more detached government control. A specific reinforcing factor

for the Belgian context was the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of education, which implied a significant restriction on the extent to which the government could intervene in school and classroom affairs. Gradually, the emphasis shifted to more autonomy for education providers and a more detached control by the government. The autonomy of schools has increased in recent decades, which has contributed to the quality of Flemish education.[196]

However, there is no real deregulation. Government regulation has changed somewhat in nature, but it has not been reduced at all. Education remains a highly regulated sector with extremely extensive legislation. Schools are confronted with numerous guidelines and instructions, not only from the government but also from intermediary structures of education providers. The heyday of deregulation also seems to be over, and governments as well as education providers have developed a tendency to retranslate their policy priorities into all kinds of guidance and regulation. This constant tension not only costs a lot of energy and resources but is also detrimental to the proper functioning of schools and therefore also to the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

A good balance is therefore needed between control, autonomy and accountability. Good management may well be decisive, but it does not require extensive and detailed regulations. Autonomy should not be a 'stay-at-my-own' story, but – in the spirit of Isaiah Berlin's concept of 'positive autonomy' – is primarily based on self-esteem and self-realization. The autonomy of teachers and schools must be interpreted positively and is thus linked to the concept of professionalism. Accountability is by no means at odds with this, on the contrary. Autonomy and accountability balance each other out. Pedagogical autonomy is counterbalanced, for example, by accountability for the learning outcomes, as measured by surveys and standardized tests. Autonomy in the use of financial resources is counterbalanced by transparent reporting.

Guidelines

Based on the above principles, we then outline the seven main guidelines of this report. These will be further elaborated in more detail in the chapters of subsequent volumes.

Guideline 1: Stimulating contemporary personnel policy in schools

An important policy area where schools need to be strengthened is that of personnel and human resources policy. This report argues in favour of allowing schools to pursue a contemporary personnel policy to a much greater extent than is currently the case. It is at school level that an effective personnel policy, adapted to the local context, can best be pursued.

There are different opinions about where teachers are best allocated. Education systems with a centralised and therefore bureaucratised teacher policy, such as France or Portugal, do not seem to lead to high quality. These policies neglect the importance of the local context and do not ensure that schools can develop into powerful environments where good education is made. The current staff statutes in Flemish education are based on a mixture of local policy, but in a highly regulated statutory framework. The Committee is of the opinion that strengthening school autonomy is a prerequisite for a contemporary and effective personnel policy; that it is advisable to situate teacher policy at school level; and therefore, to empower the school management and

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[196] Verschelde, M., Hindriks, J., Rayp, G. & Schoors, K. (2015). School Staff Autonomy and Educational Performance: Within-School-Type Evidence. *Fiscal Studies*, *36*(2), 127–155. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26604803

the school board in this. Within a public regulatory framework of rights and obligations that are the same for everyone, but with less regulation than is currently the case.

A contemporary personnel policy, based on principles of sustainability and workable work, will require a development process in many schools. We expect school leaders and boards to professionalize further and even more intensely than is already the case in personnel and human resources policy, in motivational leadership and everything that comes with it. In doing so, they can learn a lot from how other organisations in the public sphere and companies in the private sector shape contemporary personnel policy.

An important pillar of motivating human resources policy is feedback and evaluation. Teachers are entitled to regular feedback on their professional performance and to quality evaluation, when necessary, with support and coaching.

Strengthening the personnel and human resources policy at school level and making the central statutory framework more regulated, require a more thorough local culture of participation and consultation, and a strong local social dialogue. Good local personnel policy is not a matter of directive top-down management, but of motivating and shared leadership, participation and dialogue.

Seeing the school as the space within which personnel policy takes shape requires more flexibility in the statutory regulatory framework. Locally, the necessary degrees of freedom, but also the professionalism must be present to be able to respond to specific circumstances. But that doesn't mean that there isn't a need for a general framework.

Facilitating a contemporary personnel policy in schools does require the necessary respect from the government. The practice of introducing measures retroactively or communicating them to schools far too late has a devastating impact on school policy. In order to be able to implement a good human resources policy, the regulatory framework must be sufficiently firm and predictable.

Guideline 2: Strengthening school autonomy, leadership and governance

The proposals in this report have as a common guideline that school autonomy must be further strengthened, as a condition for the further development of the professionalisation of teachers. This does not imply that the government should abandon its political ambitions and priorities, but that they should be based even more than in the past on consultation, feedback from schools and teachers and input from stakeholders. Education policy is not a 'zero-sum game' in which school autonomy is necessarily opposed by the absence of policy. Rather, it is about the way in which policy is implemented and the extent to which feedback from schools and teachers is taken seriously. The final decisions at the macro level will of course remain with the democratic parliamentary majority.

In order to implement principle 4, numerous measures are needed, which are further elaborated in the report. Policymakers must recognise that the tasks of school leaders and school boards have fundamentally changed and become more onerous. Together with the appreciation for school leaders and their professionalism, a stronger role of school boards is indispensable to achieve the school autonomy that is necessary for the implementation of a strong school policy, including a strong personnel and human resources policy. To this end, an increase in administrative scale is absolutely necessary. However, greater school autonomy, stronger school governance and more professional school management also require greater accountability. Therefore, school boards will have to be more accountable for the choices they make in the future and will have to report in a transparent way.

Guideline 3: Valorising all the tasks of the teacher

Today, teachers in Flemish education are appointed in 'teaching hours', i.e. the number of hours they have to perform in front of the class. That number of hours is currently defined by the job assignment rate for each type of teacher. However, teachers do many other tasks, and their professionalism extends to all these other tasks as well. As the time-use study has made clear, the current system does not at all protect teachers from excessive workload and excessive stress. The idea that a 'teaching hour' is a fair measure of the difficulty of an job assignment is fiction: after all, the subject area, the form of education, the number of pupils, the age of pupils, and so much more vary greatly. Defining the task of teachers in teaching hours does not do justice to the rich and broad professionalism of teachers. It also creates a problematic appreciation of teachers' tasks and time use by the outside world.

This restrictive approach to what a teacher achieves must be abolished in the legal status of teachers. A contemporary performance system values the wide range of tasks of a teacher and creates clarity for all involved. It also offers opportunities for schools and teachers to do their job assignments more flexibly, to set priorities, to better value teachers' strengths and to eliminate inequalities that are ingrained in the current performance system. It must also ensure workable work and avoid stress, disease risk, absenteeism and burnout.

In 0 a proposal is made for an job assignment definition for the teacher that meets this requirement.

Guideline 4: Seeing the career as a continuum of professionalisation

Focusing on the professionalism of the teacher raises the question of how that professionalism is formed and developed throughout the career. The idea that a diploma after teacher training is a lifelong guarantee of professionalism must be resolutely abandoned. As for any profession, professionalisation is a project of lifelong learning and development. Professionalisation is a development process that unfolds throughout the entire career, starting with the candidate teacher who chooses teacher training, over the novice teacher who enters the profession, to the experienced teacher who further develops his or her expertise. At each stage of this process, appropriate support for this professionalisation must be provided. At the same time, the teacher's own responsibility to pursue the most appropriate professional development at each stage must also be underlined.

In the continuum of professionalisation, there are critical phases in which the process can easily go wrong, with sometimes dramatic consequences such as a discouraged teacher leaving the job. A poorly supervised process of professional development can lead to dropping out of the profession and thus contribute to the teacher shortage.

In 0 And next of this report, we elaborate on this continuum of professionalisation in more concrete terms.

Guideline 5: Considering professional development as a shared responsibility

Professionalism and teaching are not mere qualities of an individual. Of course, the individual teacher has a great responsibility for a successful professionalisation process. To this end, he or she must take the necessary initiatives and commit to them throughout their career. That commitment may also be appreciated and sanctioned (positively or negatively). But professionalism only acquires meaning and value in the broader institutional context of the school

and the education system, in the interpersonal and institutional networks in which education is made. Education is made by people together.

During the training, the training institute is the framework within which the professionalisation starts. During the training, the responsibility gradually shifts from the training to the teacher-to-be through confrontation with teacher teams in internship schools and beyond. At the start of the career, during the induction year and the mentoring, professionalisation takes shape in the relationship between the teacher, the supervisor(s) and the broader teaching team. The experienced teacher works continuously on further professionalisation in consultation with the teaching team and the school management.

The Flemish education field cannot boast of taking on a strong collective responsibility for starting teachers. A professional system has the duty to collectively take care of a successful start and growth in the career of the new professionals. A lot is going wrong in Flemish education in this area, although there are many schools where a lot of effort and good will is put into it. The recently concluded Declaration of Commitment between the Minister of Education, the universities and the university colleges also summons a growing desire to take collective responsibility for starting teachers. The Committee's conviction is similar, but the Committee goes even further in its proposals and recommendations.

This report argues for a strong, collectively shared responsibility of education for the professionalisation of the teacher. This presupposes stronger partnerships between teacher training colleges and schools, for example for the traineeships of candidate teachers. This shared responsibility also comes to the fore in the joint evaluation of starting teachers during the

induction year. We elaborate on this in the various chapters of Part III. The continuum of professionalisation.

Guideline 6: Making career development competency driven

Competences, largely based on knowledge (subject-specific, general pedagogical and didactic), are the beating heart of teachers' professionalism. Competencies erode and become obsolete and therefore need to be maintained and updated continuously. As with many other professions, continuous training and development is therefore necessary.

Professionalisation remains an important task for the teacher even after the start of the career. The current system of in-service training is seriously inadequate to stimulate continuous professionalisation. Moreover, the quality of what is offered in in-service training is often substandard, too supply-driven, fragmented and not adapted to the knowledge and competence needs of teachers and schools. The Committee believes that continuous professionalisation through training and informal learning should be given a stronger weight in career development. We elaborate on this in 0.

Guideline 7: Making government policy more supportive and facilitating

Education is a public service, funded by the taxpayer. The democratic government therefore has the legitimate right to regulate education. It must do this out of concern for quality and the right to quality education. In doing so, it can set its own political priorities.

This report assumes that the government can best guarantee the care for quality education by supporting and stimulating the professionalism of teachers and by facilitating the development of strong schools. This does not mean that the government should keep its distance, as is often claimed. The government can and must intervene, especially when there is a systemic failure and crisis. The teacher shortage is a clear example of this.

However, government interventions become harmful when they threaten or harm the development of the professionalism of teachers and of the capacity of schools and school boards. This also applies to intermediary structures between government and schools. Micromanagement, exaggerated direction and control and the resulting administrative burden often have a de-professionalizing effect. Regulations decided retroactively or too late in the year, so that schools hardly have time to properly prepare for implementation, are forms of bad policy.

Supporting and facilitating the professionalism of teachers and school leaders means leaving decisions that can perfectly well be made by professionals in the field. Most certainly, professionals make mistakes. But a management model that assumes that teachers and school leaders should not make mistakes and that decisions should be taken out of their hands, usually induce more mistakes by expropriating professionalism and administrative capacity.

On the other hand, the government must monitor the quality of the output and the outcomes in a decisive manner. It can do this by funding national and international research into learning outcomes and by implementing the Flemish tests. Above all, it must do this by means of an efficient education inspectorate. These quality assurance tools mainly serve to provide schools with feedback in a targeted and efficient manner. Professional teachers and schools are learning systems that need external feedback mechanisms to further optimize their functioning and adjust them if necessary.
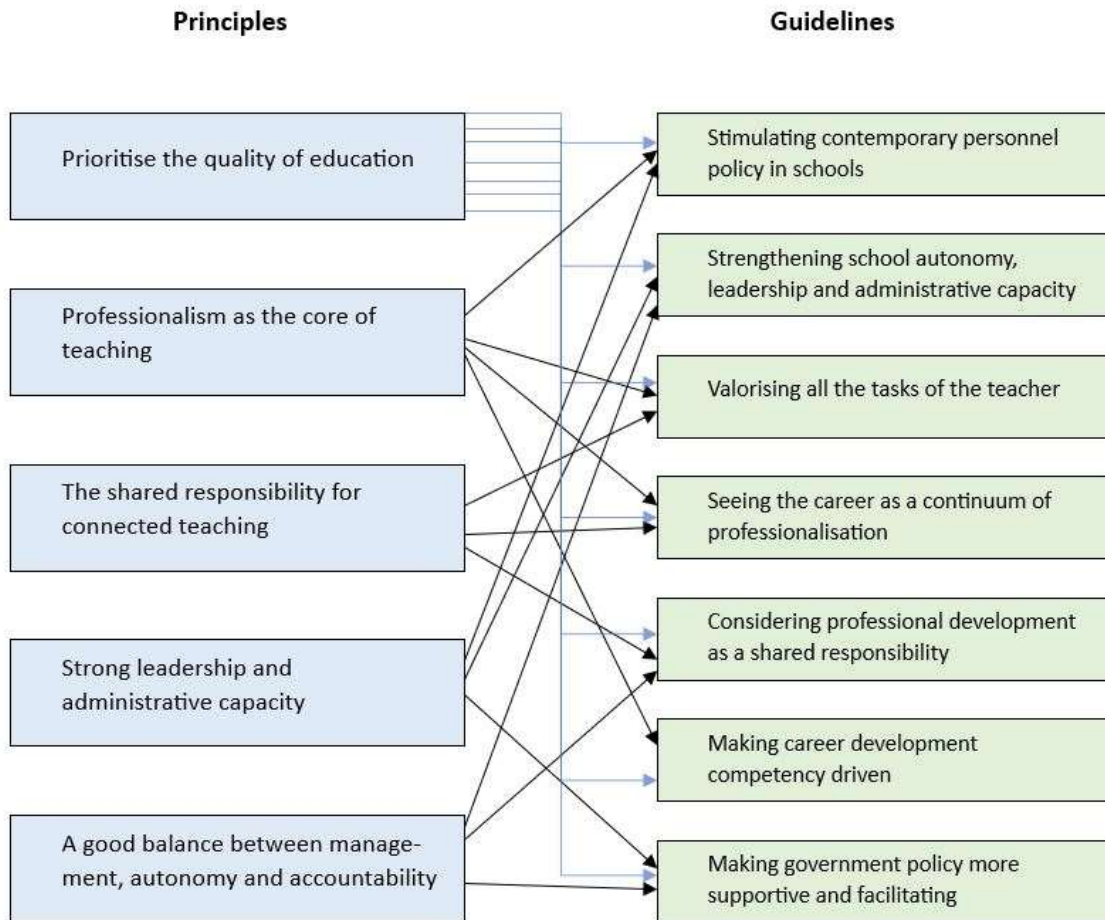
Figure 7. Coherence of principles and guidelines

Coherence of principles and guidelines

In order to clarify the relationship between the principles and the guidelines of this report, the arrows in **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.** indicate how the principles and guideline intertwine. We have confined ourselves to the most important arrows. Principle 1: Prioritise the quality of is of course at the basis of each of the guideline and we have indicated this with a different shape and colour of arrow.

Conditions

Condition 1: Achieve efficiency gains

Education itself has an important task to redistribute the available resources more efficiently and to use them more efficiently. There are important efficiency gains to be made in education. The so-called 'Flemish Broad Reconsideration' has made an exercise for a number of expenditure

streams.[197] With the recommendations of this exercise, we can start working on a broad efficiency exercise.

Efficiency gains are also possible in the field of teacher policy. The very high teacher-pupil ratios shown in international comparisons suggest that the total volume of staff resources and teacher hours should be sufficient to provide high-quality education for the total student population. The teacher shortage is to a large extent a problem of efficient allocation of resources and people. If we want to structurally improve teacher policy, efficiency gains will have to be made.

Condition 2: Realise administrative simplification and reduce administrative burden

The size and complexity of the regulations in Flemish education is a major problem that seriously jeopardises the extent to which school management and administration can pursue a good policy. This is particularly the case in the area of personnel regulations: the decrees on the legal status have degenerated into complex and somewhat messy legal constructions. With a certain amount of goodwill and political courage, a great deal of regulations can be deleted or simplified. The quality of education would greatly benefit from clear, simple and legally well-designed regulations.

In terms of administrative regulation for schools and teachers, there is a lot to be gained. Schools and teachers are entitled to clear administrative guidelines, which are communicated well in advance. Excessive, poorly formulated and untimely administrative directives are not only energy- and time-consuming, but also detrimental to the quality of education and to the professionalism of teachers.

Condition 3: Pursue fiscal neutrality

Flemish education as a whole is very well funded. In the current legislature, a considerable additional budget has flowed into education. Therefore, this report does not advocate additional budgetary efforts for education. The Flemish Government needs to carefully consider its budgetary priorities and there are many other social priorities that require more resources (including those that are also related to education, such as pupil transport in special needs' education).

The proposals in this report aim at a budgetary neutrality. There are proposals that generate specific additional expenditures, but these are offset by efficiency gains elsewhere. The Committee has not had time to simulate all this in detail. In Appendix 2. presents an initial estimate of the additional and negative expenditure of the various proposals.

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[197] https://fin.vlaanderen.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Eindrapport_OV_Geredigeerd.pdf

Part III. The continuum of professionalisation

Chapter 5. The candidate teacher

Part III discusses the challenges of the teaching profession throughout the teaching career. We see the teaching career as a continuum of professionalisation, of continuous development of the professional core of teaching. In contrast to the so-called 'flat career', we posit a perspective of a dynamic growth of the teacher.

We distinguish three major phases in this continuum of professionalisation. First, we look at the phase of the candidate teacher, in which the choice for the teaching profession is made and the teacher is trained. Next, we focus on the phase of the starting teacher, a critical phase in career development in which much can go wrong. Finally, we focus on the experienced teacher. This phasing is somewhat ideal-typical and in reality, does not proceed in an identical way for every individual teacher. Nevertheless, this phasing offers a useful view of the development of the teaching profession.

In this chapter we start with the candidate teacher.

Study choice to become a teacher

Attracting potential students to the teaching profession

Although other pathways, such as side-entry, are also important for the recruitment of new teachers, the more traditional route via the choice of study after secondary education for teacher training is still the most important route. It would be an exaggeration to say that 18-year-olds do not consider the teaching profession to be attractive. The recent slight increase in student numbers in teacher training programmes at university colleges once again gives rise to some optimism. But even so, there are signs that the teaching profession is not always considered the most preferential choice, especially by the very talented young people (the "strong profiles" or the "high potentials" as they are sometimes called). It is therefore important to look carefully at the real and potential obstacles that stand in the way of a positive choice for the teaching profession and to see what can be done to overcome them.

De Witte et al. distinguish between the following possible barriers: the perceived social status of the profession; the perceived social appreciation; the specific barriers faced by minority groups; false biases; perception of limited career opportunities; the impact of study advice in secondary education; the perception of the complexity of the job and the difficulties of daily practice.[198] All these points need to be addressed.

> The choice to become a teacher should again be seen as a positive choice. The idea that the choice of study to become a teacher is not the best choice must be resolutely corrected. Pupil Guidance Centres, but especially teachers and schools themselves, have a major impact on pupils' choice of study, and, therefore, have an enormous responsibility in this regard. It is in schools themselves that students can be motivated to make a positive choice for the teaching profession.

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[198] De Witte, K., Surma, T., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., De Cooman, R., Struyve, C., Decin, G., & Jans, N. (2023). *Aantrekken van leraren tot opleiden tot startklare professional. Hoe kunnen lerarenopleidingen en hoger onderwijsinstellingen bijdragen aan het verminderen van het lerarentekort?* https://associatie.kuleuven.be/onderwijs/lerarenopleiding.

Civil society organisations, social partners, employers, political parties and civil society at large also have a responsibility to talk about teachers. They can make a significant contribution to a more positive and supportive image of the teaching profession.

There is little scientific evidence to show that large-scale promotional campaigns for the teaching profession have much effect.[199] It's possible that, when designed well, they can have a positive effect. However, there is evidence that even a well-designed information campaign can have the opposite effect and reinforce stereotypes towards the profession.[200] Some slogans from recent campaigns were not very successful. That is why it is recommended to test campaigns first before rolling them out on a large scale. Their relatively lower cost compared to other measures nevertheless makes them a potentially valuable measure. De Cort & De Witte (2023) provide encouraging evidence of the potential of a good promotional campaign to tackle the teacher shortage. They analysed the effect of informing Flemish students in initial teacher training about the high level of trust in teachers and the high appreciation of their contribution to society by the general public, two important determinants of the status of a profession, on their preference to become a teacher over their preferred alternative career. They found that informing students increased the students' (short-term) preference to become a teacher by the equivalent of a 3.6% increase in teacher salary, and that their stated likelihood of becoming a teacher increased by 5 percentage points.[201]

A more diverse teaching staff

A very important gain can be made by tapping into the talent pool in underrepresented and minority groups in society.[202] Although recruitment is and should be broad, various groups from society are still strongly underrepresented in education, especially teachers with a migration background. Role models can be a powerful factor in lowering barriers.[203] At the same time, in order to attract minorized groups (based on the idea that as such you are not a minority but become one because you are perceived that way), barriers must also be overcome, such as the headscarf ban for teachers (in training) in many schools. Currently, this means that people with a headscarf may feel attracted to the profession, but do not get opportunities to practice the profession effectively.

It is in the interest of all pupils that the teaching corps is a reflection of society.[204] Moreover, having teachers from diverse backgrounds results in reducing pupils' unconscious biases towards

[199] De Witte, K., De Cort, W. en Gambi, L. (2023).

[200] Ajzenman, N., Elacqua, G., Hincapié, D., Jaimovich, A., Boo, F. L., Paredes, D., & Román, A. (2021). Career choice motivation using behavioral strategies. *Economics of Education Review*, 84, 102173.

[201] De Cort, W. & De Witte, K. (2023). To teach or not to teach? Job attributes, information and the supply of teachers. *Mimeo.*

[202] Van Damme, D. & Burns, T. (2018). Education and Diversity: Challenges and Opportunities. In: *Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2018 Report.* Fontainebleau: INSEAD, 53-59.

[203] Delhommer, S. (2022). High school role models and minority college achievement. *Economics of Education Review*, 87, 102222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2021.102222

[204] Kubota, J. T., Peiso, J., Marcum, K., & Cloutier, J. (2017). Intergroup contact throughout the lifespan modulates implicit racial biases across perceivers' racial group. *PloS one*, 12(7), e0180440. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0180440

minority groups. The impact of a role model should not be underestimated[205]. Having teachers with a migrant background can help vulnerable pupils to grow and excel and have a remarkable impact on their school results.[206] Similarly, broader cultural and institutional challenges, such as socioeconomic factors, may contribute to low diversity.

In order to increase diversity among teachers, different policies can be considered, and work needs to be done at different levels. Schools must be alert to what (vulnerable) pupils do not get from home and how they compensate for that. In addition, structures and systems can contribute to promoting diversity in the classroom:

- Active efforts to reduce barriers to entry to teacher education programs, such as financial support and outreach programs, can promote the recruitment of diverse groups.
- Promoting curriculum reforms to incorporate intercultural and diversity components into teacher training programs.
- Offering more internships and practical experiences that focus on working in diverse learning environments.
- Fostering positive stories about teachers from different backgrounds can change perceptions about the profession.

Incentives for under-represented groups could also be considered in order to promote a more diverse teaching staff. However, it is crucial that these measures are underpinned by continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure their effectiveness and to identify any unintended results. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all teachers, regardless of their background, is essential to embrace and maintain diversity in Flanders' educational landscape.

> The Committee argues that the ban on external denominational symbols for teachers in education should be lifted so that this barrier to tapping into talent among young people from various philosophical and religious backgrounds can be removed.

The Committee is well aware of the legal dimensions of the issue, both in terms of the constitutional aspects and in terms of anti-discrimination legislation but believes that there is sufficient scope to persuade schools to move beyond this sensitive issue and to pursue an inclusive teacher policy.

Entrance test

The selection of suitable candidates for initial teacher training can be optimised by using both academic and non-academic predictors of teacher success, i.e. by strengthening the entrance test. However, the empirical basis for the effectiveness of the selection methods is not very robust yet. There is a need for more longitudinal research to examine the relationship between teacher training selection methods and how teacher careers and effectiveness evolve over time.

Students who want to start the teacher training have had to take a compulsory entrance test for several years.[207] From the 2023-24 academic year, consequences will be attached to the result on this test for the first time. If the student does not reach the target grade and still wants to enrol in

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[205] Butt, M. (2013). The Use of Role Models to Improve Engagement of Ethnic Minority Students in Secondary School Science. *School Science Review*, 95(350), 110.

[206] Liu, K., & Ball, A. F. (2019). Critical Reflection and Generativity: Toward a Framework of Transformative Teacher Education for Diverse Learners. *Review of Research in Education*, 43(1), 68–105. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18822806

[207] Cf. https://www.vlaamsehogescholenraad.be/nl/starttoets

the teacher training programme, he/she must follow a remedial programme. In Flanders, there is annual research by the Flemish Council of University Colleges into this entrance tests. The results suggest that the predictive value of the test is not very strong. The most important reason is that being a teacher is much more complex than the knowledge of Dutch (for which compulsory remedial training is already provided), mathematics or French. Motivation appears to be one of the most important predictors.

> The Committee argues that the policy set out with regard to the Dutch entrance test should be continued, but that it should also be properly monitored in terms of validity and predictive power. Thorough research is indispensable into the relationship between selection methods, attracting strong profiles, successful completion of teacher training and entrance into the profession.

The learning ladder for primary education

> In order to broaden the access to the teaching profession in primary education, to value the pursuit of social promotion and to offer more career prospects, a learning ladder is introduced. The intention is that at each step of the Flemish Qualification Structure (VKS) 5 to 7 teacher training courses for primary education will be offered. Schools obviously have the freedom to decide for themselves on the composition of their teams.[208]

The diversity in study programmes is a good thing and attracts diverse profiles of students, while giving the prospect of growth and promotion. It is important to better define the learning ladder and to situate the programmes in a complementary way.

With a learning ladder in primary education, we mean the differentiation of the existing profiles in primary education, with the educational bachelor in nursery and primary education as the pivot. We provide a profile of teacher-assistant at VKS 5 and a profile of master in primary education at level VKS 7.

We are clearly looking at primary education here. At a later stage, the teaching assistant could also have a place in secondary education.

Argumentation

More differentiation of profiles in primary education can be argued on the basis of the following needs:
- Broadening the influx: providing a suitable qualification for all those who want to work in primary education;
- With the possibility of mobility on the learning ladder, in a subsequent (salmon) trajectory or through lifelong learning;
- Quantitative and qualitative reinforcement of the teaching staff: attracting stronger profiles at the appropriate level of qualifications;
- Social emancipation of target groups that currently have more difficulty gaining access to the education sector; in particular those who will no longer have immediate access to higher education in the context of the modernisation of secondary education;
- The different teacher training programmes lead to different professions in nature, but through smooth transition pathways they offer various realistic career opportunities;
- The redistribution of educational tasks will enable educational actors to focus more and better on their core tasks.

- Based on a contemporary HR and quality policy, schools can work with mixed, complementary school teams of graduates, bachelors and masters. In line with a contemporary HR policy, a funding envelope also gives[208] the autonomy to employ these profiles based on the profile and needs of the school and the school board.
- A more innovative education system through the possibility to work with multidisciplinary teams.

Based on a shared vision on the role and competencies of the teacher, we want to optimize the educational learning ladder. This means that we make sufficient differentiation between each sport of the ladder and that we therefore define a fully-fledged and future-oriented professional and educational profile for each profile. A clear differentiation between clear profiles, will benefit the expectations of and the cooperation with other profiles. This also means that we fill in the missing sports (especially VKS 5: teacher-assistant). We also want to guarantee smooth transitions between the sports of the ladder, as well as smooth transitions from study programmes from other domains.

Why develop a VKS 5 profile?

The development of a VKS 5 profile is a response to the societal challenges (the shortage of teachers) and aims to make the teaching profession more attractive. The reform of secondary education, whereby prospective students in the labour market will no longer have direct access to higher education, has also prompted us to think about this. Mind you, this is not just a consequence of this reform, but it needs to be seen in a broader context. Even before this reform, there was a very limited influx from secondary vocational education into teacher training, and there was a larger drop-out. Especially in pre-primary education, but also to a limited extent in primary education, there is a target group of pupils in secondary vocational education, who are interested in working with children/starting in education, but who do not have the capacities to obtain a VKS 6 qualification.

By offering a VKS 5 programme for primary education, we want to offer the group that has an affinity with education, but perhaps does not have the interest/ambition or the capacities to obtain an educational bachelor's programme, an opportunity to be employed in education.

Why develop a VKS 7 profile for primary education?

The primary aim of the master's programme in primary education is the academic training and qualification of primary school teachers (with a bachelor's degree in education in nursery or primary education), who can strengthen the school teams of primary schools. There are several arguments for working on a specific master's in primary education, linked to different target groups:
- It contributes to a more positive image and attractiveness of the teaching profession (contemporary HR policy in the education sector with growth prospects) and can thus also be an additional attraction for stronger profiles in the influx to the teaching profession (both among initial students and career changers);
- It can prevent drop-out by offering new career development options;
- It can strengthen the school teams by focusing more on complementarity in a team;
- It can be a breeding ground for a more innovative education system.

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[208] See section on envelope funding.

This can concern both teachers who start the master's programme immediately after the bachelor's degree in education, as well as teachers who have been in practice for some time and wish to follow the master's programme after a few years. If the latter target group is (also) targeted, the programmes will have to be tailored to the situation of working students, who combine studying with a job in primary education. The prerequisite remains that these master's students have already obtained an educational bachelor's degree in primary education.

The introduction of master's in primary education builds upon the knowledge and skills already acquired in the bachelor of primary education. The training enables the education professional to further specialise and build expertise, in such a way that he/she can also use and implement a wider range of teaching methods and techniques; acquires advanced knowledge in the field of educational psychology, curriculum development, research methods, etc.

Added value for education

As indicated earlier, Flemish teachers indicate that they have too little time for individual and collective professionalisation.[209] Various actors (colleges, universities, pedagogical counselling services, school groups, umbrella organisations and networks, etc.) play a role in the professionalisation of teachers and school teams and the innovation of the educational landscape. mentioned issue. The teachers' panel indicated that teachers feel that educational research does not end up in the workplace enough and therefore that the alignment between (educational) research and classroom practice deserves attention so that existing and new knowledge and insights would be better translated to the classroom floor.

In Flanders, teachers often opt for 'traditional' professionalisation initiatives such as a pedagogical seminar, courses and reading professional literature. The OECD advocates 'more effective forms of professional development', such as peer learning, coaching or engaging in learning networks.[210]

A key challenge is to organise the learning community that is a school in such a way that teachers can learn in daily practice. A learning community is a platform for professionalisation, in interaction with classroom and school development. Cooperation and exchange between schools is an extension of this.

By developing a VKS 5 profile, we want to relieve teachers of some tasks, to bring teachers back to the core of their teaching job assignment. Hopefully, this will enable them to free up more time for professionalisation.

If we want to strengthen our education, we will need more time for professionalisation as well as introduce a mix of profiles in order to create complementary school teams.

We cannot and should not expect each individual teacher to follow up on the multitude of existing and new educational research and translate it into their classroom practice. A master's degree in primary education can be expected to take on the following roles within his/her own classroom context, classroom and cross-school level:

- Preparing, substantiating and sustainably implementing educational innovations (e.g. choice for a school-wide implementation of a new reading method, a new handbook, use of technology in the classroom, co-teaching, differentiated teaching);

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[209] VLOR (2021). *Naar de kern van het lerarenberoep: aanbevelingen voor een versterkt professionaliseringsbeleid.* Advies 23122021. https://www.vlor.be/adviezen/naar-de-kern-van-het-lerarenberoep
[210] OECD (2021).

- Coaching and supporting fellow teachers in their professional development;
- Advising the school policy on educational matters;
- Following-up new scientific knowledge and insights (e.g. on reading and mathematics didactics, on differentiated teaching, on care for children with specific needs) and, where relevant, translate them into one's own teaching and school practice;
- Enthusing and coaching colleagues in initiating and implementing innovations.

Specifying the new profiles in primary education

Teaching assistants (VKS 5)

An employee at VKS 5 level is seen as an employee at a primary school who is a member of the school team but who does not take on tasks as a teacher him/herself. He or she assists the teacher with all kinds of tasks, but it is still the teacher who bears the final responsibility. This employee functions as the teacher's right-hand, he or she supports a teacher or an education team and can therefore be deployed at both classroom and school level. This is a position that is not yet common in the Flemish educational landscape.

Specifically, this concerns, for example:
- Supporting the teacher in performing simple routine teaching tasks:
    o Helps to prepare (e.g. activities, ...)
    o Supervises individual pupils or small groups of pupils who have received instructions from the teacher (e.g. level reading, group work, etc.)
    o Assists pupils with activities
    o Observes pupils during lessons, breaks and play, identifies problems and discusses them with the teacher
    o Assists with pupils' collaboration, group work, and working in corners
    o Supervises the independent work of pupils
    o Assists in the implementation/follow-up of information about the pupil tracking system
    o Supports correction tasks (based on a correction key or a criteria grid)
- Pupil counselling:
    o Supervises pupils and corrects behaviour during breaks, transportation, etc.
    o Inspires pupils to listen, to tidy up, to focus, to ask questions
    o Acts as an additional point of contact for pupils.
- Contributing practically to classroom management
- Other tasks:
    o Attending meetings if deemed appropriate
    o Helping with administration of pupils' performance and other data concerning the learning process
    o Supporting the practical organisation of trips, festivities
    o Supporting the teacher with communication with parents

Teacher assistants may not be used as care teachers (they are not teachers) or to remedy the learning deficit of low-achieving pupils (they were not taught the correct didactics for this, which can pose a risk). The teacher assistants are an added value to the professional conduct of the teacher, but do not serve to replace the teachers.[211] They must be well prepared for their role in

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[211] Department for education (2019). The deployment of teaching assistants in schools.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-deployment-of-teaching-assistants-in-schools

the classroom and be sufficiently involved in the entire school organisation. With the teacher-assistant, the bachelor in nursery and primary education and the master in primary education, a more flexible personnel policy can be realized. The three profiles are complementary to each other, so that a diverse school team can be created in which colleagues based on their complementary expertise shape and strengthen the team and the school as a professional learning community.

Master's degree in primary education (VKS 7)

For the development of a profile of the master's programme in primary education, inspiration can be found in the concept of 'teacher-leader'[212] that is often put forward in international literature on school development and educational innovation. Wenner and Campbell (2017) define the concept as *"teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom"*.[213] We recognize in this the double mandate of a teacher-leader as it was also recommended in the VLOR advice[214] and the SONO report[215]:[216]

- It concerns a qualified teacher (who has a bachelor's degree in nursery or primary education) who teaches like other colleagues. A master's degree in primary education remains employable in all pupil age groups and all learning areas.
- In addition, this teacher is given a mandate to take on temporary and/or part-time tasks at a cross-class level, whereby he/she manages and/or supports other team members, without however taking up a formal policy function (management).

Criswell et al. describe the following key characteristics of a teacher-leader:[217]
1. "An individual gains a deep understanding of educational practice, and of her/himself in relation to that practice and to the system (both locally and more broadly) within which s/he operates.
2. Through those understandings, the individual can work with others to develop a vision for producing innovation in the system, which, within school systems, means improving the practice of teaching and learning.
3. As part of realizing of that vision, the individual is able to empower others to promote change and is able to modify and marshal available resources in a manner that ensures that this change is both productive and sustainable."

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[212] There is debate whether the term *an sich* should be implemented in Flemish education. The term may suggest a form of - undesirable - hierarchy between groups of teachers, even though this is not the case in the relevant research literature, as is also evident from the definition and characterisation given in the text.
[213] Wenner, J. A., & Campbell, T. (2017). The Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Teacher Leadership: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(1), 134-171. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316653478
[214] VLOR (2017). *Advies over de master basisonderwijs*. https://www.vlor.be/adviezen/advies-over-de-master-basisonderwijs
[215] Struyve, C., Frijns, C., Vanblaere, B., Delrue, K., & De Fraine, B. (2019). *Beleidsaanbevelingen masters basisonderwijs.* Gent: Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12037
[216] The 'teacher-leader' is a variant of possible interpretations that the concept of 'senior teacher' can take on, which we introduce in section senior teachers.
[217] Criswell, B.A., Rushton, G.T., Nachtigall, D., Staggs, S., Alemdar, M., Capelli, C. (2018). Strengthening the vision: Examining the understanding of a framework for teacher leadership development by experienced science teachers. *Science Education*, 102 (2018), pp. 1265-1287 https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21472

In other words, the teacher-leader plays a key role in the processes of school development, aimed at creating optimal working conditions for the school team to achieve its educational and pedagogical goals. York-Barr and Duke explicitly make the link between *teacher leadership* and pupil performance.[218]

The above tasks are clearly distinguishable from the management office (it is also the management that provides the person concerned with the mandate). We therefore think it is important that the above roles are taken up in consultation with the management.

The VLOR makes explicit which areas of expertise the master's in primary education should be able to contribute at proficiency level 7 (on the classroom floor, in the school team, in the education system):[219]

- In-depth knowledge of learning areas (learning content and (subject) didactics)
- Expertise in the field of analysis and interpretation of data
- The opportunity to develop new ideas for educational practice on the basis of theoretical and practical knowledge and to check them against reality
- Unlocking scientific research and translating it (editing, enriching) it for use in specific practical situations
- Bringing scientific knowledge and insights into the school and using them in new, unprecedented situations, from a broad, multidisciplinary approach (psychology, pedagogy, sociology, philosophy, etc.) on how children learn, develop and live together

The master in primary education is a scientifically trained professional who works at the intersection of theory and practice. By introducing a master's degree in primary education complementary to the educational bachelor's programme in nursery and primary education, a more diverse team of teachers is created, where colleagues shape the school as a professional learning community as a team.

Prerequisites

There are various prerequisites to be met before a master's degree in primary education and/or a teacher-assistant can take effect.

In primary schools

The introduction of new profiles is only possible and allowed if one has carefully considered the possible consequences for a school:

- Job classification – HR policy: Before the masters and/or graduates can start, it is important to clearly define different tasks/roles of a master's degree compared to bachelors in primary education as well as to graduates. If we want to avoid disputes in the team between colleagues with a different diploma, a solid job classification plan with a salary structure is important. A job classification is the basis for further decisions regarding remuneration, based on the principle that a different position and other competences require a different remuneration.
- The use of master's degrees should not lead to fewer teachers in the classroom, especially in primary education. Additional resources will therefore have to be provided to pay for the

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[218] York-Barr A. J., Duke K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 255–316.
http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00346543074003255
[219] VLOR (2017).

extra wage costs associated with the use of master's programmes in primary education. In addition, the use of a graduate teacher-assistant should not be at the expense of fewer teachers in the classroom. Reducing the number of teachers in the classroom in primary education should be avoided at all times.

- When a master's degree in primary education is introduced, the remuneration issue of the principal of primary education should be examined.

For the organisation of both study programmes

Of course, the master's degree in primary education can only be offered by the universities, but the process towards these study programmes can only be realised in an equal collaboration between colleges and universities. Therefore, minimal agreements are being drawn up in cooperation between the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) and the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA).

Teacher training

On 16 November 2023, the Minister of Education, the VLIR and the VLHORA jointly presented a "Declaration of Commitment between the Flemish Minister of Education and the teacher training programs to jointly ensure more educational quality". In this document, various policy initiatives are announced on teacher training programs. This declaration of commitment , among other things, mentions agreements on the curriculum of the educational bachelor's programs, making the educational programs more attractive, the so-called first aid package for career changers, the master's program[220][OBJ], the training schools as partnerships between schools and teacher training programs, a training course for internship mentors, the professionalisation of teachers in teacher training programs and the training of school leaders.

The Committee takes note of this declaration of commitment and notes that most of the agreements are largely in line with what it advocates in this report. However, the Committee is concerned about what it considers to be a risk of devaluation of teacher training. She understands that in an acute teacher shortage, opportunities are being sought to get people into the classroom quickly, more specifically with career changers. However, the literature is very unambiguous: a good didactic, subject-specific and corresponding didactic training is an absolute prerequisite for high-quality education. A short crash course can never replace an in-depth training as a teacher.

> The Committee argues for a strong focus in teacher training on the subject-specific and associated didactic training. Both are linked to each other and require sufficient space in the study programmes.

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[220] In dit rapport besproken als deel van de leerladder. Zie de paragraaf The learning ladder for primary education

Basic competences

The candidate teacher who has successfully completed the teacher training program is expected to master the basic competences laid down by the Flemish Government (Flemish Government Decree of 8 June 2018).[221] "They are both a frame of reference for the curriculum development of teacher training programs and an individual assessment framework for each student in the teacher training program."[222] The ten functional units and the eight attitudes describe the basic competences of teaching.

The basic competences and the professional profile on which they are based express in a comprehensive way what can be expected of the teacher today. As such, they are a guideline for teacher training programmes, but also for each individual teacher. However, the following critical remarks can be formulated.

Firstly, the basic competences are very comprehensive and broad. Because they have the ambition to strive for completeness, a wide range of competences is created. There is no prioritization of the ten functional units and the competences, so that the impression is created that they are all equally important.

Secondly, the question can be asked whether they can realistically be achieved by all teacher training programmes and by all students. There is no form of follow-up or monitoring to test the feasibility and realisation, even though they are an important element of the quality framework in internal and external quality assurance.

Thirdly, the above-mentioned Decree involves a tension between the expectation that each individual starting teacher has acquired all the basic competences and the observation that the teaching profession is increasingly developing to be teamwork. A consistent vision of the teacher as a team-player, as explained above,[223] should also be reflected in the basic competences in a distinction between the competences of an individual teacher and those of teacher teams.

> We consistently advocate defining the professionalism of teachers as members of a multidisciplinary team.

Fourthly and finally, the Decree also implies a tension between what the starting teacher should have acquired as competences and what should develop in the subsequent stages of the development of the professional career. Some basic competences cannot be expected to be sufficiently present in the first years of professional practice. A vision on professionalisation as a continuum and lifelong learning requires an elaboration of basic competences as a development process through professionalisation. The competences of the teacher develop at different levels and during different phases in the professionalisation process:

1. Initial competences to be developed in the training
2. Initial competences that are developed and strengthened through practical experience (internships, induction year, professional experience)
3. Competences that belong to the domain of the senior teacher (expert competences).

In the proposal to introduce an induction year, we suggest a distinction between the basic competences acquired in teacher training and those that can only be developed 'on the job'.

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[221] https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=15404
[222] *Ibid.*
[223] See paragraph on the teacher as an autonomous team player.

The Committee recommends that the professional profile and basic competences be regularly evaluated, in consultation with the teacher training programmes and the educational sector, and that adjustments be made if necessary.

Chapter 6. The novice teacher

Once trained, the teacher awaits the important moment when he or she starts the teaching career. The start in the career is a critical moment. Not all the knowledge and competences acquired in the training appear to be useful and competences still need to be developed for many challenges in classroom practice. We emphasise the great importance of a good start and propose a series of measures to support the starting teacher in the crucial phase of the professionalisation process.

The great importance of a good start

An important critical phase in the professionalisation process of the teacher occurs after the completion of the teacher training programme and the start as a teacher. The novice teacher has acquired the starting competences, and these equip him or her as a starting professional. Just like in any other job, a starter needs to grow in order to be able to master the many challenges of the job. But many starting teachers are confronted with the so-called practice shock, the feeling of being overwhelmed by the demanding reality of the job, the challenge of classroom management for which they feel insufficiently armed. All too often, starters have to combine job assignments from different schools, they are often assigned the most difficult classes or are given unrealistically difficult job assignments. There are many obstacles that may hinder the start of the career and can cause starting teachers to drop out. In this phase, intensive, appropriate guidance is necessary.

The workplace of the starting teacher is therefore a crucial component in the professional development.[224] In the workplace, the teacher is confronted with the full complexity of the teaching profession. The induction of the novice teacher is a crucial stage in keeping teachers in the profession. Good guidance is indispensable, and the school team also plays an important role in teacher retention.[225]

Recruitment and allocation

Today, teachers are recruited by a school (board) and assigned to the school. This gives teachers a familiar framework to work within, but such limited employability can limit a teacher's professional opportunities and career prospects. It also limits the possibilities for school boards to implement a high-performance HR policy.

> The Committee proposes that teachers should not be assigned to the schools, but to the school boards. This facilitates a wider and more interesting employability, both from the point of view of the staff member and the school board.

Currently, recruitment and allocation are done at school level. School boards are employers but grant autonomy to schools themselves. The main advantage of assigning teachers to the level of

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[224] Devos, G. & Tuytens, M. (2013). De loopbaan van leraren en het belang van professionele leergemeenschappen. In R. Vanderlinde, I. Rots, M. Tuytens, K. Rutten, I. Ruys, R. Soetaert & M. Valcke (Eds.). *Essays over de leraar en de toekomst van de lerarenopleiding* (pp. 57–68). Gent: Academia Press.

[225] Thomas, L., Tuytens, M., Moolenaar, N., Devos, G., Kelchtermans, G. & Vanderlinde, R. (2019). Teachers' first year in the profession: The power of high-quality support. *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(2), 160-188. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1562440

the school board is that teachers can be deployed more flexibly across schools linked to the same school board. However, it is important that school boards recognize and respect the need for sustainable integration into close-knit school teams. Affection to a school board also allows boards and school leaders to realize variation in the careers of teachers by giving teachers the opportunity to work in another school (for example, where their expertise can be an added value at that time or because they themselves are ready for change). The current limited allocation is a barrier to this.

Finally, an allocation at the level of the school board also means an administrative simplification, because there is no need for a new job assignment every time a staff member changes schools with the same school board, something that often has to happen today, for example in secondary schools with multiple school numbers.

> As a rule, a new teacher is recruited at the beginning of a school year and for one full school year, except in the case of replacements.[226] This ensures stability and job security for the staff and thus increases the attractiveness of the profession. This will also allow schools to implement an effective personnel policy and for teachers to integrate sustainably into close-knit school teams, which will benefit the quality of education. For the school board and the school management, this measure means a reduction in the administrative burden, because there are far fewer staff movements (recruitment and termination) during the school year. This one-year period is possible because the proposal for the allocation of the staff budget to the school board includes a replacement in the budget[227] and is in line with the introduction of the induction year.[228]

A necessary condition for the successful implementation of this change is a further acceleration of the upscaling of school boards in subsidized education.[226] For education organized by cities and municipalities, the ongoing merger movements may open up new perspectives.

Proof of subject-specific competence

We established earlier in this report that most teachers in Flanders, especially the permanently appointed ones, are competent for their job, i.e. they have the right certificate of subject-specific competence.[227] The risk of a loss of quality of education due to teachers who are less well trained or less precisely trained is therefore relatively limited. However, it remains very important that teachers possess sufficient subject-specific and related didactic knowledge and competences, but instead of situating everything in the initial teacher training, we can also place this in the perspective of professionalisation and lifelong learning.

The current system of certificates of competence is very complex and administratively difficult to work with. Establishing the concordance between the changing field of higher education and the subjects to be taught in secondary education is becoming an increasingly difficult task. The implementation also absorbs a lot of administrative energy for teachers themselves and schools. Due to the flexibilization of higher education and the proliferation of new study programmes, the concepts of 'training' and 'diploma' have partially lost clarity.

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[226] Zie 0
[227] See the section on professional competence.

In general

The Committee is in favour of simplifying the system of certificates of competence and giving more authorization to the heads of schools. The regulations will only stipulate a minimum qualification level of teacher training. The school leader will check to what extent the candidate teacher has followed the correct subject-specific and corresponding didactic training for the position. If this is not the case, or not in full, a training programme can be agreed upon as part of the individual professionalisation plan[228] in which the necessary volume of credits of professional and didactic competence can be acquired.

To support schools, but not as part of the regulations or the legal status regulation, the government, in consultation with teacher training programmes and education providers, will draw up a list of study programmes that meet the minimum qualification level.

Primary education

For primary education, for example, it is self-evident that the applicant can present a diploma of a bachelor's degree in primary education. However, the existing possibilities for recruiting teachers in primary education with a bachelor's degree in secondary education will be broadened, so that the school leader can decide, for example, to bring in more subject-specific or subject-didactic expertise in certain subjects or domains in the third stage of primary education. On the other hand, someone with a master's degree who has not completed the teacher training programme in educational bachelor's degree in nursery or primary education cannot be employed in primary education. So, we wouldn't to go so far as to open the door completely to remunerating any master in primary education as a master's degree.

In implementation of the learning ladder, the possibility is opened to[228] recruit teachers in primary education who have followed a specific in-depth master's programme in addition to their educational bachelor's degree. As provided for in our proposals on teachers' remuneration[229,] these teachers, but only these teachers, can receive a supplement.

Secondary education

For secondary education, the applying teacher for general subjects must be able to present at least a bachelor's degree in secondary education. Of course, a master's qualification with teacher training is also possible.

The Committee advocates that teachers with both a qualification in educational bachelor's and at master's level should be admitted to all grades and tracks of secondary education. It is up to the school leader to choose the right profile for the position in question and to assess the teacher's professional and didactic competences. Any shortages can be eliminated through additional training integrated in the individual professionalisation plan.

The Committee remains strongly convinced that excellent professional and didactic training are necessary to guarantee a high quality of education. The teacher shortage should not be an excuse for a downward spiral in terms of subject-specific and didactic competences. It is undesirable that, for example, in the third stage of a discipline with a strong mathematics component, the subject of mathematics should be taught by a bachelor's degree in secondary education. A subject-specific and didactic training at master's level remains necessary.

The flexibilization that we are advocating does not detract from this, but mainly has to do with the way in which this should be managed. Detailed regulations such as those we currently have with regard to certificates of competence are not only very cumbersome but leave very little room for the school leader. It is up to the school leader to be the gatekeeper of the quality of education and to make the right judgments. With the professionalisation plan and subject to an offer of micro-credentials by universities and university colleges, the school leader has an instrument at his disposal to strengthen the subject-specific and subject-didactic competences of a teacher if necessary.

In concrete terms, this means that bachelors and masters can function side by side as members of the teaching team throughout secondary education. However, the additional competences in terms of subject matter and related didactic level of teachers with a master's degree will be honoured by a supplement in the remuneration.[228]

This flexibilization also provides added value in terms of complementarity and synergy between the two levels of qualifications. Relative strengths and weaknesses of both can be compensated for by good cooperation in teacher teams, rather than leading to competition and territorial battles.

The professional and didactic competence is demonstrated by the transcripts of diplomas and other certifications. The Committee assumes that at master's level, the subject-specific and related didactic programme covers at least 60 credits, whereby at least 30 credits in education in the relevant subject area must be demonstrated in terms of subject content, at least 12 credits for the associated teaching methodology and at least 6 credits for the internship in order to be able to teach that subject.

Missing subject-specific and/or didactic competence can be acquired or updated through specific programmes completed with micro-credentials offered by colleges and universities. However, it is important to review the financial framework for micro-credentials so that they are not necessarily loss-making for higher education institutions. After all, in the strict sense of the word, micro-credentials are credit-contracts in which higher education institutions are bound by the agreement to ask a student fee of 250 euros starting costs plus 12 euros per credit taken. An alternative regulation is therefore needed to make micro-credentials financially viable on a large scale.

For technical and practical subjects, at least an educational graduate degree is necessary. However, the Committee advocates specific training, pre- or in-service, based on a partnership between university colleges and industry, in order to train technical and practical teachers.

For certain fields of study and subjects in technical and vocational education, the professional competence can also be demonstrated by RAC (recognition of acquired competences). However, the procedures for this must be made more flexible than is currently the case, so that acquired competences can be tested and validated more quickly and easily.

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[228] *Ibidem*

The Induction Year

Argumentation

The start of the career as a teacher is generally considered to be the most essential stage in the process of continuous professionalisation. The first few years are crucial.[229] A failed entry into the profession can lead to early retirement and a loss of trained teachers. The gap between what one has learned in the training and what one experiences in the reality of school and classroom life, the so-called 'practice shock', can be so great for some teachers that they lose motivation and pleasure in the job. It is therefore important that every effort is made to make the start of the professional career as successful as possible for all starting teachers.

For some time now, opportunities have been created in Flemish education to support starting teachers through mentoring. Despite the limited number of hours that schools are given for this, in many schools the mentoring is implemented in a serious way. Analysis of the TALIS 2018 data by the OECD shows that starting teachers in Flanders have access to mentoring to a higher extent than the OECD average.[230] Nevertheless, its development in Flanders remains suboptimal. The quality of the guidance and support of new teachers often remains dependent on school policy and fortuitous circumstances.

It is therefore necessary to structurally anchor the guidance and support starting teachers need during the first year that are in the profession.[231] The empirical evidence shows that well-designed induction programmes for novice teachers not only lead to more teachers staying in the profession and higher job satisfaction, but also to new teachers experiencing accelerated professional development, with positive consequences for the quality of education and student learning outcomes.[232] The problem, however, is that existing induction programmes are often too short, too insufficiently intensive and too non-committal. The uptake by starting teachers is

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[229] Thomas, L., Tuytens, M., Moolenaar, N., Devos, G., Kelchtermans, G. & Vanderlinde, R. (2019). Teachers' first year in the profession: The power of high-quality support. *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(2), 160-188. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1562440; Kelchtermans, G. (2017). Should I stay or should I go?: unpacking teacher attrition/retention as an educational issue. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(8), 961–977. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1379793

[230] OECD (2019). *Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, OECD Reviews of School Resources, OECD Publishing, Paris. Figure 4.2. https://doi.org/10.1787/b7aaf050-en.

[231] In its recent white paper on teacher training, the Flemish Council of University Colleges VLHORA also argues in favour of a 'starter year': *"By means of a starter year (= the first year of employment as a teacher after graduation), it is possible to invest in a more gradual transition to practice under the guidance of a coach. Starting teachers thus get the chance to build on learned competences combined with solid initial guidance on the shop floor. This creates a stimulating climate with room for exploration so that they can further develop into strong teachers."* VLHORA (2023). White Paper lerarenopleiding. https://www.vlaamsehogescholenraad.be/files/PUBLICATIES/ONDERWIJS/WHITE_PAPER_DEF_noCROP.pdf. Our proposal for an induction year is an elaboration of the Better Education Committee's recommendation 56. Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021).

[232] Kutsyuruba, B., Godden, L. and Bosica, J. (2019). The impact of mentoring on the Canadian early career teachers' well-being, *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 8/4, pp. 285-309. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-02-2019-0035; Ingersoll & Strong, M. (2011). The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201–233. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323; Smith, T. M. & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What Are the Effects of Induction and Mentoring on Beginning Teacher Turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(3), 681–714. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041003681

therefore often substandard. Based on TALIS 2018 data, Eurydice calculated that only half of young starters participate in mentoring trajectories.[233]

> The Committee proposes to introduce a paid induction year, in which the starting teacher is intensively guided and supervised. During this induction year, the starting teacher acquires the competences that can only be developed in the workplace and in interaction with more experienced colleagues. The first year of employment in education will therefore be an induction year, a form of 'on-the-job training' of starting teachers in the first year of the career. By formalizing this, it becomes a structural part of teachers' professional development, a right for starting teachers and a formal job assignment for schools. It is essential that the joint responsibility of training institutions (teacher training institutes) and schools (with education providers and pedagogical guidance services) is central to this.

The objective of the induction year is to give the starting teacher the opportunity to acquire those starting competences that cannot be acquired in a formal training context but only in the workplace itself. Teacher training cannot be expected to be able to develop all the basic competences, even in the case of a thorough internship. Nor can one blame the teacher training programmes for the fact that teachers are still confronted with a 'practical shock'. For a number of starting competences, learning on the job through 'learning by doing' is necessary. This applies, for example, to pedagogical tact (doing the right thing at the right time; educational intuition).[234] The development of pedagogical tact requires (a lot of) teaching experience and time to be able to reflect on the approach in a solution-oriented way together with others. In this way, the transition between education and work becomes less sharp. The induction year then fulfils the function of a link between education and work.

The induction year is therefore fundamentally different from the mentoring that continues to exist after the induction year. The proposal introduces a distinction that has been in place for some time abroad between induction and mentoring. The induction year is a necessary addition, not a substitute for the learning and professionalisation process during teacher training. The induction year also goes against the demand for extension of the duration of the educational bachelor's programmes in teacher that is sometimes raised.

Licensing as a teacher

In many foreign education systems, a distinction is made between the diploma at the end of teacher training and the professional qualification ("*license to teach*") that gives access to the profession.[235] In our educational model, it is difficult to distinguish between the civil impact of the diploma and access to the profession. However, in a number of professions there is a tendency to regulate access to the profession in addition to the civilian effect of the diploma. Access to the profession is then granted following an appropriate procedure in which professional organisations play an important role. In our country, this is the case for accountants and tax consultants, lawyers, architects, auditors and psychologists, among others. The procedures for access to the

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[233] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2021). *Teachers in Europe: Careers, Development and Well-being*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/teachers_in_europe_2020_chapter_2.pdf

[234] Bors, G., Stevens, L., Andersson, A., Letschert, B., van der Raadt, R. & Verbeeck, K. (Eds.). (2014). *Pedagogische tact: Op het goede moment het juiste doen, ook in de ogen van de leerling*. Maklu.

[235] Darling-Hammond, L., Wise, A.E., Klein, S.P. (1995). *A License to Teach. Building a Profession for 21st Century Schools.* New York: Westview Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429039928

professional title and the exercise of the profession vary from case to case, but almost always involve a period of practical work in the workplace under the supervision of an experienced professional. In some other professions, a period of practical and on-the-job learning is included after basic training, but still largely under the responsibility of the training institution with the involvement of the professional field. This is the case, for example, for medical specializations or nursing.

> Following the example of many countries[236], we propose to investigate the introduction of a teacher's licence in Flanders as well. The induction year that ends with a licence then fulfils the function of a link between education and work.

The advantage of licensing is that the transition between education and work is less abrupt, and the starting teacher goes through a period of intensively supervised professional practice in addition to the teacher training. In concrete terms, one could envisage the following route: after successfully completing the teacher training programme, the starting teacher acquires one of the prevalent diplomas (bachelor's degree in primary education, for example). With this diploma, the starting teacher can be recruited by a school board and he or she gets access to the induction year, which is a mixed work-study programme. The starting teacher only acquires the professional title of 'teacher' after successfully completing the work-study programme during the induction year. There is only one professional qualification 'teacher' for all types of teachers. Of course, the professional title is valid for the entire Flemish education system.

The professional title of 'teacher' is awarded after successful completion of the induction year. Although this is almost automatic in some professions, it seems advisable to provide an evaluation for it. This evaluation is different from the regular evaluation of functioning teachers. A possible proposal would be to organize an evaluation committee at the level of the school where the induction year took place, but with the involvement of at least two other schools, of the teacher training college and of the relevant professional organisation if it exists.[236] This examination board evaluates the induction year based on a report and grants the professional title.

In theory, therefore, there is the possibility that the evaluation committee decides not to grant someone the professional title. In the study that we recommend on the introduction of the 'teacher' license, it should be examined what legal consequences this could have.

Conversely, the examination board may decide that the teacher acquires the professional title of 'teacher', but the school may nevertheless decide that the teacher in question cannot continue to work at that school. One can be qualified as a 'teacher', but for example do not fit within the pedagogical project of the school or within the school team as envisioned by the school management. These are two separate decisions. Incidentally, the 'click' between the pedagogical project that the school management has in mind and the vision of the teacher is an important factor in the retention of teachers.[237] Recent research has shown that the 'teacher buy-in' to the

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[236] Zie de paragraaf Professional organisations of teachers and school leaders
[237] Vekeman, E., Devos, G., Valcke, M. & Rosseel, Y. (2017). Do teachers leave the profession or move to another school when they don't fit?, *Educational Review*, 69:4, 411-434.
https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1228610

vision of the school management is essential for the functioning of the teacher, the commitment of the teacher and the retention in the job.[238]

Modalities

The induction year is only possible with at least 50% appointment. A maximum of 1 year of FTE induction year is possible, to be spread over a maximum of two school years. The school undertakes to limit the proportion of teaching tasks in the job assignment and to provide an adapted job assignment for the starting teacher that maximizes the learning opportunities ('*opportunity to learn*').[239] The government regulates this as little as possible so that the school can develop tailor-made solutions. During the quality screenings, the Inspectorate evaluates the school's policy regarding the induction year.

During the induction year, the teacher is simply remunerated as a teacher. The school can use the envelope that the school receives for this.[240] The induction year is therefore fundamentally different from an 'internship' that takes place in a training context. It's about learning and professionalizing in the workplace.

The teacher in an induction year has full authority as a teacher, participates fully to school activities, is a full member of the school team and participates fully in the class council.

Schools are given resources to enable the guidance and support of starting teachers in an induction year. Teacher training programmes also receive resources for their role in supervision and evaluation of starting teachers in an induction year.

Mentoring early-career teachers

> After the induction year, the mentoring of early-career teachers continues. Focusing on professional and effective mentoring can ensure that we can keep starting teachers in the field. Effective mentoring with an eye for the development of the teacher on a personal, social and professional level is part of the solution to the teacher shortage.

A stronger focus on teacher retention, rather than recruitment, is a cost-effective measure.[241] Research shows that the support experienced by new teachers increases their engagement and motivation to stay in the teaching profession and leads to better teaching practices and educational performance of pupils.[242]

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[238] Jerrim, J. (2023). The link between teacher buy-in and commitment to their school. Pre-print. https://johnjerrim.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/wp_buyin_october_2023_final-embedded-figures-and-tables.pdf

[239] In the budget simulation, we assume that teaching tasks are limited to 60% of what a FTE teacher would normally take up, but this is only an estimate, not a normative guideline.

[240] See the section on the staff envelope structure.

[241] Doherty, J. (2020). A systematic review of literature on teacher attrition and school-related factors that affect it. *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal*, 12(1), 75-84

[242] Ingersoll, R. M. & Strong, M. (2011). The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201–233. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323; Wang, J., Odell, S. J. & Schwille, S. A. (2008). Effects of Teacher Induction on Beginning Teachers' Teaching: A Critical Review of the Literature. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(2), 132–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487107314002; Waterman, S. & He, Y. (2011).

The induction year is a first, powerful period of mentoring, but one year is too short for a sustainable professional start. In one year's time, a starter has not had enough time and opportunities to grow. Given the complexity of the job, there is not enough time to properly supervise starters. By mentoring we mean drawing up and following up an individual learning path together with the starters. This can be done on the basis of lesson observations, feedback conversations, starters who have the time to observe more experienced teachers, intervision moments for starters and their mentors or in short: time for exchange. That is why further mentoring is necessary after the induction year.

Research by European Schoolnet and a focus group set up by Teach for Belgium suggest the following *good practices*:[243]

- Provide sufficient time for counsellors to offer effective guidance in proportion to the number of starting teachers and their guidance needs. Relevant information from teacher training can be provided in order to set up an individual learning path.
- Use a clear job description for mentors with a clear mandate, range of tasks, roles and selection criteria. In the absence of this, the difference between a "normal" teacher and an initial supervisor is unclear, for starters and colleagues, which in turn contributes to a lack of "status" for the initial supervisor and the expectations associated to the job.
- Create learning communities around initial counsellors across schools and umbrella organisations. This can be facilitated by the pedagogical guidance service of, for example, local educational centres (Ghent, Brussels, etc.) or pedagogical counsellors of school groups and monitored by the inspectorate. This allows for the development of an ecosystem and network of a large number of stakeholders who can respond to the individual needs of beginning teachers. This is preferably done on a regional basis.
- Creating an effective and pragmatic training offer for both experienced and junior mentors with a focus on strengthening the teacher's basic competences, but also coaching with the aim of strengthening the teacher's resilience and reflective capacity so that they can continue their own learning process as the years progress. University colleges are already working on specific mentor training and there is also a lot of experience and expertise in coaching to be found in civil society organisations and non-profit organisations, active in the field of education (e.g. Teach for Belgium).

Permanent employment and tenure

Employment contract for an indefinite period

> After the induction year, the teacher is appointed for a school year. From the third consecutive school year, the teacher is contractually appointed by the school board for an indefinite period.

An employment contract for an indefinite period (or an open-ended contract) is different from what is called a 'tenure'. The teacher remains subject to the legislation concerning the employment contracts.

Effects of Mentoring Programs on New Teacher Retention: A Literature Review. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *19*(2), 139–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2011.564348

[243] European Schoolnet (2023). *Ondersteuning van de beginnende leerkracht. Onderzoeksgebaseerde strategieën voor scholen*; TeachforBelgium (2022). *NEST project: Aanbevelingen voor aanvangsbegeleiding, resultaten van de focusgroep van mentoren.* Brussel: TeachforBelgium

A contract for an indefinite period of time does not give the teacher any priority rights. Although the current TADD-system (in which personnel is appointed for an indefinite period of time) does offer additional security for teachers at the beginning of their careers (i.e. prior to the 'tenure'), but it also has perverse effects. Moreover, it is contrary to the principle of recruitment and allocation to school boards.

With the introduction of the induction year, the current TADD-system will be abolished.

Tenure

The school board can decide at any time, once the induction year has ended, to appoint the teacher permanently. This is a decision to be made by the board. Since we define the job assignment of a teacher completely differently, the condition that there must be 'vacant hours' in which someone can be permanently appointed no longer applies. The school board decides within the margins of its staff envelope and within the limit of max 80% permanent appointees.[244]

In the public debate on education in recent years, as well as in the consultations carried out by the Committee, there have been voices calling for the introduction of a legal status in education that is identical to labour legislation in the private sector, with fixed-term and open-ended contracts.

The Committee advocates maintaining the tenure for teaching staff. Education is a public sector, fulfils public functions and for the staff there is therefore a need for a legal status regulation that guarantees permanent employment.

Tenure is an important component of the current regulations governing the legal status of teaching staff, even though there are important differences in employment relationships between the various education providers. There are good reasons to keep this tenure. It provides security, continuity and stability in the practice of the profession. It protects the professionalism of the teacher and invites both the teacher and the school to invest permanently in professionalisation. And it also protects the teacher from arbitrary dismissal, political interference and threats to the professional autonomy that comes with being a teacher.

Job security is an important factor in the attractiveness of the teaching career and the retention of teachers. The tenure also guarantees the independence and professional autonomy of teachers. The abolition of permanent employment would have many perverse effects and represent a fundamental break with current practice in a context where priority must be given to increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. An evaluation of a policy decision that abolished appointment in a U.S. state shows that there were significant impacts on teacher retention.[245]

While retaining the permanent employment, there are also good reasons to mitigate its perverse effects in the current legal status regulations. For example, too many leave systems, the priority rules for appointment, the limited ability of school leaders to build and maintain a coherent team, etc.; all too often, they pose a threat to the quality of education. The rights of permanent appointees can stand in the way of the influx, the advancement and the motivation of young,

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[244] See the section on envelope funding.

[245] Barrett, N., Strunk, K.O. & Lincove, J. (2021). When tenure ends: the short-run effects of the elimination of Louisiana's teacher employment protections on teacher exit and retirement, *Education Economics*, 29:6, 559-579, https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2021.1921111

starting teachers. The main disadvantage of the tenure is that it works to the disadvantage of starting and early-career teachers, where the attrition from the profession is the highest.[246]

> The Committee argues in favour of a contemporary legal status system which, while maintaining the tenure system, outlines a statutory framework that is as simple as possible, which makes it much easier for schools to organise high-quality education than at present.

The following elements can be considered, among others.

> The decree measure that provides a tenure after one year should be reversed. The reasoning for quickly offering job security to starting teachers is understandable, but the measure creates too many perverse effects on the field. The appointment comes too early in the process of professionalisation of starting teachers, especially when the induction year would be introduced. School leaders and boards have too little time and opportunities to see the starting teacher perform and make an informed decision.

The tenure must be a positive decision that is in line with the school's personnel policy. The school must be given sufficient time and space to ensure that the teacher in question is not only competent, but also a good fit within the school and its project.

> The maximum percentage of tenured teachers per school board makes it possible to abolish the job reassignment scheme whereby redundant permanent staff members are placed in another school/with another school board. After all, the job assignment of the staff to the school board instead of to a school creates a wider employability than is currently the case.[247]

A necessary condition for abolishing the current job reassignment system is upscaling the school boards, so that the range of possible positions in a school board is sufficiently large and sufficiently stable. Recruitment and inclusion of a teacher in the school team should always be positive decisions. It is disastrous for a school team when a teacher is forcibly 'dropped' into a school. When this happens, it is made impossible for the school management to implement a good personnel policy.

The transfer of a permanently appointed staff member from one school board to another is best regulated by mutual agreement.

The rights of tenured teachers who enter a leave system in order to retain their position must be drastically curtailed.[247]

Performance and evaluation

An often-heard argument against tenures is that it provides excessive protection for poorly performing teachers and that it is virtually impossible to dismiss them. Since the change to the regulations that came into effect on 1 September 2021, this argument is no longer convincing. In the case of open-ended employment contracts, a procedure with adequate justification must also be followed before dismissal for poor performance can be carried out.

> The new system of evaluation of teachers' performance must be evaluated within a number of years. As the proposals and recommendations in this report are implemented, the evaluation system will also have to be adapted accordingly.

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[246] De Witte, K., De Cort, W. en Gambi, L. (2023).
[247] See the section on leave schemes and career breaks.

Chapter 7. The experienced teacher

Gradually, the teacher acquires the knowledge and competences that make him or her an experienced teacher who can perform his or her job with a high degree of autonomy but integrated in a team. This phase in the process of continuous professionalisation also has challenges that require specific measures. Professionalisation must be seen in the context of lifelong learning. For some, competence development can lead to a new step in their career and a new challenge.

Consolidation of professionalisation

After about five years, we see that most teachers have a good command of the various tasks and competences that are expected of them. Then we speak of experienced teachers. These are conscious teachers who stand behind their choice for the teaching profession. Here, too, we know that the measure of autonomy and the support of colleagues are important influencing factors for teachers to stay in the profession.[248]

However, we also know that there is a desire for more challenge or variety in the career of teachers. These teachers now often end up in middle management positions or in management positions or go to the pedagogical guidance services, the inspectorate or elsewhere. However, the opportunities for this are limited. We therefore advocate a further distinction in the careers of teachers between experienced teachers and senior teachers.

Professional autonomy

Through experience and professional growth, the teacher acquires a greater degree of professional autonomy. Teacher autonomy refers to the degree of freedom and discretion that teachers must have to make professional decisions regarding their teaching practice, curriculum, and instructional methods.[249] It includes the ability of teachers to make independent judgments and choices about what and how they teach and how they evaluate. Increased professional autonomy of teachers has a positive impact on job satisfaction, the feeling of being able to control the workload and the intention to stay in the profession. These results are not surprising given the main role of autonomy as a driver of human behaviour and well-being according to self-determination theory.[250] It is therefore very important to protect and, if possible, promote the professional autonomy of teachers.

However, the autonomy of teachers is not absolute. It may come into conflict with those aspects of education policy, which take initiatives to improve the quality of education, but which may

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[248] Mombaers, T., Vanlommel, K., en Van Petegem, P. (2020). *De Loopbaan van Onderwijsprofessionals*. Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12911

[249] Worth, J. & Van den Brande, J. (2020). Teacher Autonomy: How Does It Relate to Job Satisfaction and Retention? *National Foundation for Educational Research*; Jerrim, J., Morgan, A. & Sims, S. (2023). Teacher autonomy: Good for pupils? Good for teachers? *British Educational Research Journal*, 00, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3892

[250] Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological inquiry*, *11*(4), 227-268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

inadvertently have the effect of undermining the professionalism and autonomy of teachers. Well-intentioned educational innovations that are imposed top-down can also be experienced by teachers as a restriction of their professional autonomy and thus contribute to demotivation and possibly even departure.[251] Education policy, as well as pedagogical counselling services and others who intervene in schools and classroom practice, must therefore always keep in mind that they value the professional autonomy of teachers positively and not reduce it.

Many teachers feel that their professional autonomy is insufficiently valued and is at risk, especially due to regulation, increased accountability pressure and administrative burden.[252] Research shows that many teachers see educational reform as a violation of their professional autonomy and agency.[253] The Dutch Education Council also emphasized the great importance of recognizing the personal professionalism of the teacher in its advisory report "Being a teacher".[254] A high degree of professional autonomy, agency and self-efficacy is crucial for the realization of high-quality education. Increasing the professional autonomy of teachers would be one of the most effective ways to promote the quality of education.[255]

> The government, as well as education providers, should carefully examine the effect of each measure on the professional autonomy and capacity to act of teachers. A kind of 'teacher test' should be considered for every policy proposal.

Continuous professional development

Importance

Professional development through continuous professional development is widely regarded as a very effective way of improving the quality of teachers and thus of education. However, professional development is also an adequate way to improve teachers' job satisfaction, reduce their workload by bringing more efficiency and effectiveness to their work, and keep teachers in the profession.[256] However, the scientific literature does indicate that in order to be effective, professional development activities must have a strong content focus, encourage active learning, have a sustainable duration, provide collective participation, and facilitate coherence and ownership.[257] A recent VLOR advisory report put it as follows: "A strengthened professionalisation

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[251] Knight, R. (2020). The tensions of innovation: experiences of teachers during a whole school pedagogical shift, *Research Papers in Education*, 35:2, 205-227, https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1568527
[252] Oosterhoff, A., Oenema-Mostert, I. & Minnaert, A. (2020). Constrained or sustained by demands? Perceptions of professional autonomy in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *21*(2), 138-152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949120929464;
[253] Lundström, U. (2015). Teacher autonomy in the era of New Public Management, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2, https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.28144
[254] Onderwijsraad (2013). *Leraar zijn*. Verkenning no. *20130027/1029*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad. https://www.onderwijsraad.nl/binaries/onderwijsraad/documenten/adviezen/2013/03/07/leraar-zijn/Leraar-zijn.pdf
[255] Hyslop-Margison, E.J., Sears, A.M. (2010). Enhancing Teacher Performance: The Role of Professional Autonomy. *Interchange* 41, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-010-9106-3. Zie ook: Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional Capital. Transforming Teaching in Every School*. Teachers College Press.
[256] Coldwell, M. (2017). Exploring the influence of professional development on teacher careers: A path model approach. *Teaching and teacher education*, 61, 189-198. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.015
[257] Ansyari, M. F., Groot, W. & De Witte, K. (2020).

of the teacher can also be an important lever for the (re)valuation of the teaching profession and for the quality of education".[258]

Continuous professional development aims to continuously deepen and refine teachers' knowledge base and competences and to stimulate teachers' ability to reflect and adjust their own professional practices. This self-reflexive ability is a very important component of professionalism.

However, we cannot say that professional development is well developed in Flanders and is seen as an important lever for career development and professionalisation. The budgets made available for this purpose have recently been increased but are still insufficient: 118.12 euros per year per primary school teacher and 129 euros in secondary education. An additional budgetary effort for professionalisation, which can be channelled to the schools integrated into the discoloured operating funds, will therefore be necessary.

In 0 we found that Flemish teachers spend only 0.2% of their working time on professional development, much less than in other countries. Schools differ greatly in the extent to which and the way in which they shape a professionalisation policy.

The range of professionalisation programmes in Flanders is extensive and diverse in terms of both content and form, but it is also highly fragmented. There are many initiatives by many stakeholders (schools themselves, teacher training colleges, training bodies, pedagogical counselling services, publishers, consultants, etc.). These initiatives concern a rich spectrum of content: content at micro, meso and macro level, content that is more subject-didactic or general pedagogical-educational, content that concerns all possible challenges of education (impact of school architecture, diversity, differences in prior knowledge, identity of pupils, choice of teaching methods and/or digital tools, language policy, etc.). The initiatives also show a wide variety in terms of concrete approaches (personal coaching programmes, information sessions on request, participation in design teams, short-term seminars, learning paths, etc.).[259]

The current range of professionalisation initiatives in Flanders is not very transparent. There are also questions to be asked about the content and relevance of the various programmes. The quality of what is offered is sometimes dubious. Teachers also stress the need for a concrete translation to the classroom.

However, the lack of a strong professionalisation policy should not only be seen as a provision problem. Teachers may be interested in in-service training, but they are not active actors on the demand side of the in-service training market. Teachers need to realise that respect and appreciation for their professional autonomy is only possible when they take full responsibility for continuous professional development. Continuous professional development, in interaction with the professional experience *on the job*, is the key that allows the teacher to mature professionally.

> Teachers need to raise their profile in the demand for professionalisation by articulating more strongly what they need. Professionalisation must be demand-driven and not supply-driven by the accidental interests of providers.

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[258] Flemish Educational Council, VLOR (2021).

[259] Van Melkebeke, L., Henkens, B., Maes, B. (2023). *Bouwstenen voor een professionaliseringsaanbod voor leraren*. Non-published paper.

Elaboration

By structurally integrating professionalisation into the teacher's job assignment,[260] we value continuous professional development. Each teacher draws up a personal professionalisation plan every year, which is part of his or her job assignment. As a learning organisation, each school develops an annual professionalisation plan for the teaching staff as a whole, striving for a balanced development of expertise, adapted to the profile of the school and its school population. The school management draws up the professionalisation plan in consultation with the teaching team. During the quality screening, the Inspectorate evaluates the quality of the professionalisation plan.

> In consultation with the school management and within the framework of the professionalisation plan of the school and the school team, each teacher designs a personal professionalisation plan. As a rule, this plan involves a combination of formal training, independent informal learning and participation in non-formal education.

Formal forms of education and training can be part of a professionalisation process if it makes sense, but professionalisation is not intended to pursue additional qualification. During the performance review, the school leader evaluates the implementation of the professionalisation plan. The implementation of the professionalisation plan is a prerequisite for the granting of seniority jumps in the remuneration of teachers. In this way, continuous professional development becomes an integral part of teachers' career development.

A personal professionalisation plan can include a multitude of formal and informal learning activities:[261]
- continuing education through courses and workshops;
- conferences, seminars and seminars;
- formal training and micro-credentials;
- independent processing of professional literature;
- working visits to other educational institutions, companies and organisations;
- participation in research projects;
- mentoring and peer observations;
- participation in learning networks and learning communities.

The choice and coherence of activities in a personal professionalisation plan is based on an analysis of the learning needs and requirements in function of the optimization of one's own professional practice. Ideally, a professionalisation plan should include a mix of formal and informal activities.

The necessary time must be provided for the implementation of the professionalisation plan. Continuous professional development thus becomes an important time component in the teacher's job assignment. This time should coincide as little as possible with the time spent on the teaching job assignment and other tasks that are carried out in direct contact with students. The common practice of 'pedagogical seminars' interrupting the educational process should therefore be eliminated as much as possible. The instruction time must be preserved as much as possible.

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[260] Cf. Chapter 8

[261] Based on: OECD (2009). *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/education/school/43023606.pdf

The implementation of the professionalisation plan is discussed during the performance reviews between the school management and the teacher. In the event of serious shortcomings, the school management will report this to the Ministry of Education and Training, which can then suspend the annual seniority increase in the salary scale.

Regulation of the in-service training market

Demand-oriented continuing training is a sound principle; there is no point in reintroducing supply-side control. But demand management can lead to an unregulated and chaotic market of upskilling initiatives. The fragmentation of in-service training and the frequent complaints about low quality and relevance raise questions about the need to better regulate provision.

A study of the effectiveness of professionalisation initiatives came to the following list of characteristics of effective programmes:[262]

1. Focus on the content: translate the content offered into daily teaching practice. In this respect, it is also important to contextualize cross-curricular content (e.g. dealing with media, civics) within certain learning areas and subjects.
2. Focus on (subject) didactics: offer insight into how pupils learn content from specific learning areas or subjects or cross-curricular and cross-curricular themes.
3. Coherence: ensure sufficient alignment with the daily practice and goals of teachers and with the broader school and education policy.
4. Research-based: make sure the content is based on scientific research findings.
5. Ownership: the content and process of professional development are more meaningful to teachers when they meet their self-identified needs and interests.
6. Duration: to bring about change, extensive and intensive programmes are needed (i.e. activities of at least 20 contact hours), including ongoing support.
7. Collective participation: mutual interaction, collaboration, consultation and feedback between internal and external colleagues provides a powerful form of professional learning.
8. Educational context: ensure that the activities are embedded or continue in the daily work environment (schools, educational locations).
9. Active learning: provide continuous reflection on and practice in professional and academic knowledge; teachers should be co-creators of knowledge rather than mere consumers.
10. Quality of the trainer: substantive knowledge and skills of the trainer are essential; to this end, it is possible to collaborate with experts from the field.

On the basis of this list, it would be possible to identify the professional development programmes that are worthwhile. For example, it could be required that in-service training is based on co-creation, so that teachers have a strong voice in the content and didactic development of the programme. On the basis of such criteria, a quality mark can then be awarded to initiatives.

In-service training initiatives that meet certain characteristics are labelled to enable schools and teachers to identify high-quality and effective supply. Every year, a register of certified programmes is published.[263] This will also be the case for training for school leaders.[264]

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[262] Merchie, E., Tuytens, M., Devos, G. & Vanderlinde, R. (2016). *Hoe kan je de impact van professionalisering voor leraren in kaart brengen?* Brussel: Departement Onderwijs en Vorming. Merchie, E., Tuytens, M., Devos, G. & Vanderlinde, R. (2018). Evaluating teachers' professional development initiatives: Towards an extended evaluative framework. *Research Papers in Education,* 33 (2018) 2, 143-168. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2016.1271003

Senior Teachers

In the international literature, people sometimes refer to them as 'expert teachers'.[263] In a study by Hattie, the distinction between experienced and senior teachers is indicated as follows.[264] Senior teachers have an even deeper understanding of learning and teaching processes, they are good at challenging students, regardless of their abilities; they are good at detecting learning problems quickly and effectively, and they know how to remedy those problems.

It would be useful to provide a senior teaching phase for teachers in their careers, in which they meet the criteria mentioned. The question naturally arises as to who can decide whether the teacher meets these requirements or not. There must be two perspectives at play here. In the first place, the teacher must have proven this expertise in the school where he or she works. For example, teachers could put together a portfolio that showcases their expertise. It is also important that principals of the school where the teachers work also acknowledge and confirm that expertise. Ultimately, it is very important that teachers testify to that expertise in their own practice.

> We advocate an objective procedure to give teachers with a minimum seniority of 15 years the status of senior teacher. In that procedure, both the personal expertise and the HR perspective of the school must be taken into account.

A Committee composed of representatives of other schools, teacher trainers, staff representatives or other experts in addition to the school management evaluates the teacher's application and decides whether or not to grant the status. As a result, the recognition of the status of senior teacher becomes more objective. The granting of the status of senior teacher is accompanied by an additional salary. This can be justified by the external, objective procedure.

The senior teachers should, of course, remain active as teachers in the classroom. For example, they could be used for difficult classes or for the guidance of pupils with complex problems. These senior teachers are essentially focused on the students. In addition, we can distinguish a second type of senior teacher, namely the leading teacher or the previously mentioned figure of the 'teacher-leader'.[265] This type of teacher mainly concentrates on his colleagues. Especially in professional learning communities, such leading teachers could play an important role. Tasks as a mentor of novice teachers, but also as a coach of more experienced teachers, as subject group chair, as responsible for the professional development of teachers or of important projects concerning educational innovation fit in well with this.

This perspective in teachers' careers could provide an important boost to teachers' professional development towards the competences that senior teachers should possess. A more directed focus on these key skills can deepen and optimize the quality of teachers' professional development.

Another benefit of this additional career stage is that senior teachers could play an important role in fortifying schools as professional learning communities. A more explicit positioning of senior teachers would provide additional opportunities to share their expertise with colleagues. This could benefit all teachers. The same goes for the teachers in charge. The deployment of these teachers could undoubtedly strengthen the policy-making capacity of schools. Better support for

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[263] Devos, G. & Tuytens, M. (2013).

[264] Hattie, J. (2003). *Teachers make a difference: what is the research evidence?* Paper presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research Annual Conference on Building Teacher Quality, Melbourne.

[265] See the section on masters in primary education (VKS7)

professional development projects, innovation processes, mentoring and coaching of colleagues could be a substantial step forward in the capacity of schools and the quality of education provided.

Part IV. School organisation and policy

Chapter 8. The job assignment of teachers

Professionalisation and school organisation are two sides of the same coin. In this Part III, we look at the way in which the school supports the professionalisation of teachers. This is done, first of all, by redefining the job assignment of teachers, so that all the tasks of a teacher are fully recognised and valued. By doing this, the school organisation will also be adjusted.

A Redefinition of the job assignment of Teachers

False perception of teachers' job assignment

The perceived undervaluation of the work that teachers is connected to the way in which their job assignment is defined. The current definition of the teacher's job assignment in number of teaching periods per week is highly misleading and perpetuates the perception that teachers perform fewer hours than other professionals.

That perception is at odds with reality. According to research, teachers work at least 40 hours a week. Teachers also work during school holidays[266] and weekends. Analyses within our Flemish context[267] and international research[268] show that, on average over a full year, a 40-hour working week for a full-time job assignment is representative of the actual working time. Many tasks of the teacher, which also require a lot of time and energy, are unfairly left out of the job assignment definition and this contributes to a false perception of the work that teachers have to do. This tension between a widely shared perception and reality creates a feeling of being overloaded and undervalued among many teachers.

No longer expressing the teacher's job assignment in teaching hours

The way in which the teacher's job assignment is defined is symbolically important. All the tasks performed by the teacher must be recognized and accounted for. So, we move away from expressing a teacher's job assignment in contact hours (of 50 minutes) that only refer to the teaching tasks.

From now on, we will express a teacher's job in 38 hours which a full-time staff member must work on a weekly basis to properly perform all tasks, just like in other sectors. However, that does not mean that teaching will become lost in the total package of tasks. The core task of EVERY teacher is everything that is connected to students and the classroom, and teaching is and will remain the most important part therein. In principle, every teacher stands in front of a class.

The advantage of such an approach is that it is clear to everyone what the task of a teacher encompasses, what the core task is and what are the additional tasks that are needed to keep a school running (such as structural consultation between the teachers of a team, professionalisation, guidance and mentoring, shared leadership, etc.). At the same time, the

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[266] The Committee has not addressed the problem concerning school holidays and the possible shortening of the summer holidays.

[267] Survey: Time spent by primary and secondary school teachers: https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/onderzoek-tijdsbesteding-leraren-basis-en-secundair-onderwijs

[268] Van Droogenbroeck, F., Lemblé, H., Bongaerts, B., Spruyt, B., Siongers, J. & Kavadias, D. (2019). *TALIS 2018 Vlaanderen* - Volume I. Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

teacher gets a good and realistic picture of what his job assignment really entails. The school will have a better instrument than at present to distribute the work fairly among the staff and to take into account the principle of workable work, a good *work-life balance* and efficiency. Also, a better demarcation becomes possible than is currently the case between tasks that are inherent to teaching and tasks which may be considered as administrative burden and must therefore be phased out.

Clusters

In the job assignment of teachers, in all levels of education, tracks and subjects, we distinguish three clusters:

Cluster 1: teaching and teaching-related tasks.

The core task of the teacher consists of pedagogical-didactic activities with pupils, which for the sake of convenience we will call 'teaching', and the tasks that are inherently associated with this (planning and preparation, evaluation, consultation, classroom (primary education) and subject (secondary education) guidance. This cluster is the centre of gravity of a teacher's job assignment. Basically, this cluster is part of every teacher's job assignment.

In the definition of a teacher's job as proposed here, the performance denominators disappear. So, it will no longer be fixed how many hours (of 50 minutes) each category of teacher should teach, but we assume as a guideline that this cluster will take about 32 hours (of 60 minutes) per week. The relationship between effective teaching time with pupils and the other tasks within this cluster will of course vary and it is up to the school management to determine the most efficient, equitable and workable relationship in dialogue with the teacher concerned, taking into account the pupil population and context factors.

On an individual level, the number of hours spent on this cluster will vary greatly. 32 hours is a guide number, but the reality can be different for an individual teacher in plus or minus.

Many schools are starting to work with distance learning as a result of the recently changed regulations. In principle, distance learning does not change what we mean by 'teaching' here. It is true that distance learning changes the pedagogical-didactic activities of the teacher, but the overall time investment does not change significantly in the longer term. In the case of distance learning, more investments are generally needed upfront, which are only later compensated by economies of scale. It is up to the school leader to take this into account when determining the job assignment of each teacher.

Cluster 2: professionalisation.

As stated earlier in this report, the Committee believes that a significant effort is needed in the field of professionalisation of teachers. Professionalisation is an absolute prerequisite for high-quality education. Time for professionalisation must therefore be embedded structurally in the core task. We propose a guideline of on average of 2 hours per week to be spent on professionalisation,[269] which is significantly more than the 0.8 to 0.9 hours per week mentioned earlier in this report.[270] Again, this can vary on an individual level, but the number of hours for professionalisation can never be zero.

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[269] As we outlined in section Continuing professional development, this is not exclusively about formal training, but looking at professionalisation in a broad sense.
[270] Cf. Professionalisation

Cluster 3: school- and education-related tasks.

This cluster includes all tasks that are relevant to provide high-quality education and to run a school, such as the reception of new pupils, non-subject-specific pupil guidance, mentoring, supervision, pupil council, school play, being responsible for the subject, mentoring, organisation of cultural activities and travel. We can take as a guideline that an average of 4 hours per week are spent on tasks in this cluster.

The regulations do not impose minimum or maximum hours for each cluster, but it is up to the school management to put together an appropriate job assignment in consultation with the teacher. The guidelines referred to above are merely indicative in this regard. Transparency is important in this respect and the principles are laid down via local social dialogue. The school management strives for an efficient and fair distribution of the tasks in the school among the teaching team, taking into account the capacity, experience and preferences of each teacher, and consults before reaching a decision. The interpretation of the job assignment must therefore be fair and deliberated. The job assignment is recorded in a document that can be consulted by the inspectorate during the audit.

A 38-hour job assignment does not in any way mean that the teacher is supposed to be physically present at the school for 38 hours, nor does it mean that the teacher is accountable for where and when the tasks are performed. The professional autonomy of the teacher is accompanied by trust. The school management monitors the results of the performance of the tasks and discusses the quality of the performance regularly in performance reviews with each teacher.

The Committee is of the opinion that there are sufficient margins in terms of efficiency to assume that it should be possible to organise education at 38 hours a week with the current teaching population, especially in secondary education. For primary education, these margins are significantly tighter and the effects of the measure on the ground will have to be closely monitored. Elsewhere in this report, the Committee argues, for example with the 'teacher-assistant',[271] an expansion of the staff resources for primary education.

Implementation and prerequisites

We are convinced that such an organisation enables schools to tackle challenges more flexibly on an annual and weekly basis, that it meets the need to integrate professionalisation into daily educational practice and facilitates a contemporary HR policy. It is also important to emphasise here that with the introduction of this new system, we are guaranteeing and potentially even increasing the retention of teaching periods for pupils. This proposal does not envisage a radical change in terms of time use.

However, the proposed rules are much more flexible and clearer than the current ones. Firstly, the teacher's range of tasks is mapped out as a whole and also linked to the remuneration as a whole. In addition, schools and teachers can respond to their teamwork and to the needs within their context. Finally, we increase the administrative capacity of schools by linking the time spent by teachers to the policy results within the quality framework.

Only the time spent in hours per week and the number of days per year is made explicit. How school teams deploy those hours, where they perform them, at what times they are performed..., these are matters on which the schools can and may make their own decisions.

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[271] Cf. Why develop a VKS 5-profile?

Within the proposed system, schools will be given more flexibility and ownership to achieve a positive school climate. As a result, the leadership capacity and the quality of the organisation within schools becomes even more important.

School Organisation

Educational flexibility

The disappearance of the 'teaching period' of 50 minutes as a unit for teacher performance also creates educational opportunities for making education more flexible, which could be a possible strategy in a period of teacher shortage. Although the past has shown that the standard practice of 50' lessons is an effective form of education and schools and teachers are used to working with this standard practice, also other variations with time and space in the teaching-learning process are perfectly conceivable. These variations also allow for different modalities in the deployment of teachers. It is not up to the government to impose certain models for this. Schools and education providers can, as is already the case in some schools today, work with different models, provided that they are as evidence informed as possible and are tested for their effectiveness for effective learning.

Making work organisation more flexible

Flexibility of work organisation is an important feature of the teaching profession. A recent review by the Education Endowment Foundation shows that flexible work organisation is an important factor that – although hard scientific evidence is lacking – apparently contributes to the recruitment, retention and stability of the teacher population and the job satisfaction, well-being and career development of teachers.[272] On closer inspection, Flemish teachers generally already benefit from the flexible work organisation as studied in the report for England, such as flexible hours, working from home, online work, etc. Part-time work is also common in Flanders. Recent developments such as distance learning are likely to bring further flexibility to the organisation of work.

One of the main shortcomings of the current way in which the teacher's job assignment is determined is that almost automatically the teacher ends up in a rigid and boring pattern where he or she is given the same tasks every year. Lack of variety in the tasks leads to boredom and can be a reason for demotivation and dropout. The system proposed here makes it possible to build in variation in tasks for an individual teacher and rotation of tasks between teachers, which has a motivating effect. A more flexible interpretation of the job assignment will lead to more dynamic careers and will have a positive impact on absenteeism and dropout.

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[272] Harland, J., Bradley, E., Worth, J. (2023). *Understanding the factors that support the recruitment, and retention of teachers – review of flexible working approaches. Mixed methods review*. London: EEF/NFER. https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-flexible-working-approaches.pdf?v=1699860723

Chapter 9. School leaders and school boards

In this chapter, we will focus on two crucial actors in school affairs: the school leader and the school board. Just as we do for teachers, we advocate a competency-driven vision of the professionalisation of school leaders with training and professional development. School boards also deserve recognition for their important role.

School leaders

Running a school is a complex job and, as can be seen from the situation sketch in chapter 2, the social and organisational challenges that schools face are very great. School leaders are key figures in creating a quality learning environment for pupils and a quality working environment for teachers, and it is essential for the quality of our schools and our education that we succeed in attracting leaders with the right profile.[273]

Under the term school leaders, we consider following posts: Principal, Deputy Principal, Coordinator, Technical Advisor (TA) and Technical Advisor Coordinator (TAC).

In this chapter, we briefly discuss various aspects of school leadership that can help to make the job of school leader more attractive and to attract and retain high-quality school leaders, in particular the profile of the school leader, remuneration, status and professionalisation.

Profile

Recently, a "core profile for school leadership in Flemish education", has been drawn up by a working group within the Negotiation Committee SectX-C2-OOC 49 led by Geert Devos.[274] This core profile approaches school leadership in an integrated way and it "*makes clear and visible what leadership in schools is all about, both for school leaders, but also for school boards, team members, trainers of school leaders, policymakers and the outside world*".[275]

Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden. shows the building blocks of the core profile. This indicates the importance of an integrated approach to leadership in schools. Conceptually, values, personal traits and essential leadership practices are distinguished. In reality, these are very closely linked and mutually influence each other.

The figure also indicates that the actions of the school leaders are ultimately (indirectly) aimed at the realisation of quality learning, the development of learners and the well-being of the learners. To this end, various leadership practices are proposed.

And as mentioned earlier, context plays an important role. The practices are always realized in a concrete, unique context. The context therefore determines the way in which and the extent to which leadership is given. Moreover, concrete leadership practices are always given meaning in a specific context. School leaders actively and responsively adapt their actions to the context in which they work, without being dictated by that context. In addition to general characteristics of the context (e.g. location, level of education, size, etc.), extracurricular structures, such as a comprehensive school, can also determine how leadership practices are shaped.

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[273] Devos, G. (2019).
[274] The profile can be consulted via this link (in Dutch).
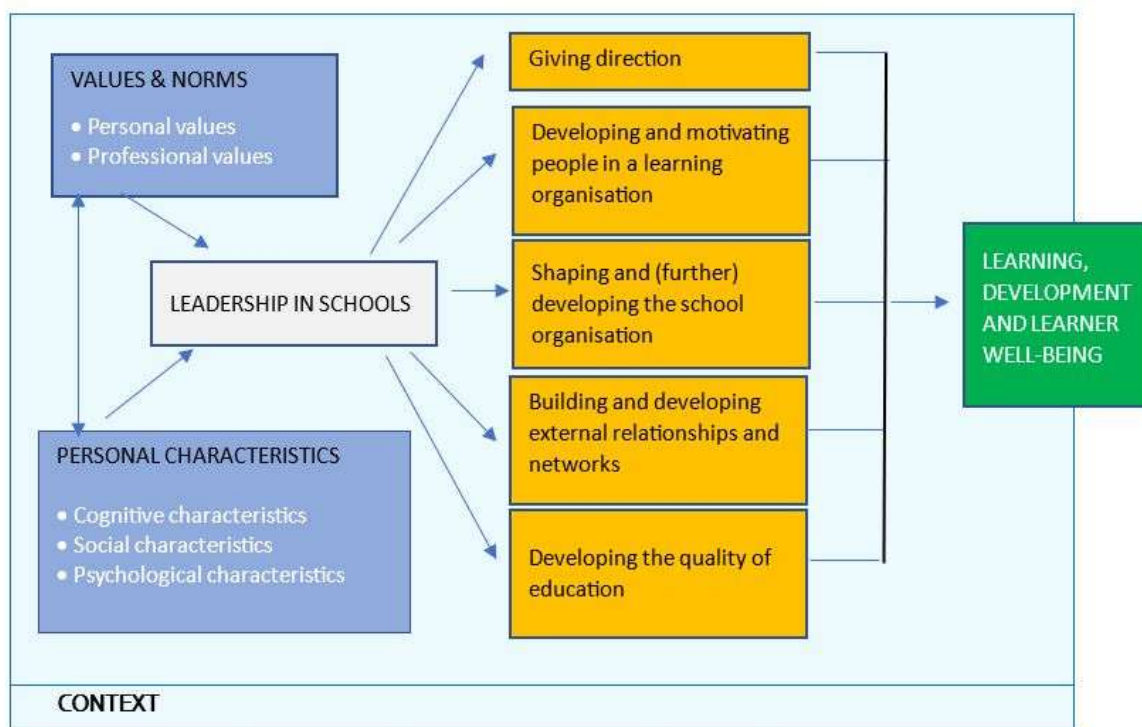[275] From the introduction to the core profile.

Figure 8. Visualisation of the core profile of school leaders

> We fully endorse the core profile for school leaders and in the future, it will serve as a basis for the recruitment and professionalisation of school leaders, provided that it is reviewed on a regular basis (e.g. every 5 years) and adapted to new needs and scientific insights.

To successfully meet the multitude and complexity of challenges faced by school leaders, shared leadership is the most appropriate formula.[276] It goes without saying that in such a model there must be a broad educational expertise in the management team and that setting out the lines at the pedagogical and didactic level are priorities, as is the support of the teachers in that area. But practice shows that the management team of a school also needs expertise in other areas, which are not directly related to education, such as finance, infrastructure, HR management, work organisation and personnel and welfare policy. In order to attract a sufficient number of school leaders with the right profile and competences, it is advisable to broaden the recruitment of school leaders by also opening up these posts to candidates outside education and without a pedagogical certificate of competence.

> The condition that a school leader must be in possession of a certificate of pedagogical competence should be removed. When recruiting a school leader, it is the task of the school board to make a thorough screening of the pedagogical and educational leadership of the candidate when it comes to positions that are directly related to the educational and pedagogical policy of the school. When composing the entire team of school leaders and the competencies that are present there, other aspects such as financial and personnel policy can of course also be screened.

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[276] Cf. Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021), Advice 41.

The recent measure[277] that increases the envelope for administrative and policy support in primary education and also makes it possible for primary schools to appoint a deputy principal is a step in the right direction to strengthen school leadership in primary schools, but is still insufficient to meet the pressing need, especially in larger primary schools. That is why the support of specialists in a particular subject (e.g. in the composition of a multidisciplinary team) must also be included in the analysis.[278]

Specifically for primary education, where the envelope for policy and policy support is smaller than in secondary education. School leaders should be able to fall back on more extensive support in a structural and efficient manner.

Statute

Leadership positions are no longer appointed permanently but become mandate posts. The term of a mandate is 6 years, and the mandate can be extended, so that continuity in the school policy can be maintained, if necessary or desirable. The mandate is linked to a mandate allowance, which is in principle eligible for the calculation of the retirement pension.[279]

The mandate system gives both parties, the school leader and the school board, the opportunity to objectively look at and evaluate the performance of a school leader and it gives both parties the opportunity to terminate the mandate, without this having to lead to loss of face. If the staff member was a permanently appointed staff member in education before taking up the mandate, he or she will in principle return to his or her previous job and the mandate allowance will lapse. If the staff member was not working in education before taking up the mandate, a suitable job will be sought through outplacement.

Professionalisation

Today, there is no legal training framework for school leaders. Therefore, we see major differences in the field, though most education providers are moving towards some form of obligation. In the GO! schools pre-service training becomes mandatory; for the OVSG schools, almost every municipal council requires a certificate of participation in a school leadership training prior to the appointment or the appointment as a principal. There is no such obligation in privately subsidised education, but there is an offer of in-service training, for which a large majority of the new directors sign up.

In view of the essential importance of the principal in a school, a generalised framework of professionalisation and competence development for school leaders is required, based on the core profile. School leaders also draw up an annual professionalisation plan that is discussed with the school board. Professionalisation includes both pre-service and in-service training courses to which training providers can subscribe. These programmes, like those aimed at the professionalisation of teachers, receive a quality mark. Customization is necessary, of which RAC is also a part. At certain points in their careers, it is recommended that school leaders voluntarily participate in an assessment that will allow them to gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses in leadership and human resources management.

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[277] Circular BaO/2005/09.
[278] Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021).

Performance and evaluation

School leaders also have the right to regular feedback on their performance. They benefit from performance reviews and evaluations aimed at improving their professional performance. The school board plays an important role in this, but as for any manager, a system of bottom-up or 360° evaluation is also recommended.

School boards

The landscape of school boards in Flanders is very diverse. In 2022, there were 26 school groups with administrative authority in GO!, 229 school boards in officially subsidised education and 551 school boards in private subsidised education. If we look at the evolution of the past decade, we see that there has been a movement of administrative upscaling, especially in private subsidized education. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of school boards from 1,095 in 2013 to 806 in 2022 and a decrease in the number of so-called "single boards" (1 school board for 1 school) from 535 in 2013 to 335 in 2022.[279]

Small-scale certainly does not imply that a school board cannot work professionally, but it certainly does not make professionalism easier. It prevents the successful implementation of some personnel policy measures, and it hinders an efficient HR policy in schools and at the level of the school board. Larger boards will have more financial leeway, increased risk diversification and greater investment capacity. But on the other hand, diseconomies of scale may arise if the scale becomes too large. For example, there is a loss of efficiency in the event of excessive economies of scale: the mechanism of budget maximisation can lead to further economies of scale, even when marginal benefits no longer outweigh the marginal costs (of coordination). There is a risk of anonymity and reduced involvement of staff and parents.[280]

There is probably no such thing as the perfect scale for a school board, but practice at home and abroad shows that both too big and too small are not good.[281] For example, at the administrative level in the GO!, there are risks to the administrative capacity of school groups that are too large. The Brussels School Group, the largest school group of GO!, comprises 17 secondary schools, 42 primary schools, 5 academies, 1 adult education centre, 31 day-care centres, 1 pupil guidance centre (CLB), 4 boarding schools, 1 multifunctional centre and 1 central kitchen (Agape). The administrative capacity of this can be questioned just as much as the fact that school boards in private subsidised education are too small.

It is by no means the intention to infringe on the constitutionally enshrined freedom of education, but it does seem essential to encourage the school boards of free and officially subsidized education to continue and even accelerate the movement of administrative scaling that has started in the past decade. After all, a certain administrative scale is a necessary condition for being able to anchor a number of measures that can improve the quality of the educational process, learning outcomes and personnel policy. In particular, we are thinking of aspects of personnel policy such as recruitment, allocation and employability at the level of the school board

[279] Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2023a).

[280] Onderwijsraad (2005). *De bestuurlijke ontwikkeling van het Nederlandse onderwijs*. Advies van Onderwijsraad. Den Haag.

[281] Devos, G. (2014); Onderwijsraad (2023). *Een duidelijke positie voor schoolbesturen.* https://www.onderwijsraad.nl/binaries/onderwijsraad/documenten/adviezen/2023/09/28/schoolbesturen /Onderwijsraad+Een+duidelijke+positie+voor+schoolbesturen.pdf

instead of at the level of the school.[282] Without a certain administrative scale, it is impossible to implement such changes successfully.

> The Committee believes that in the short-term further work is necessary for administrative upscaling.

In this context, it is important to point out that we only mean the scale of the school boards and certainly not the size of the schools themselves.

The decentralization that characterizes our education system and the freedom that goes with it ensure, among other things, that school boards bear a great responsibility as they are ultimately responsible for their schools and as employers of the staff. And yet it is true that the place of school boards in the regulations is often ambiguous and unclear and that school boards occupy a somewhat strange intermediate position between the government and the school. That place must be clarified and properly enshrined in the regulations.

In order to create a solid framework for the scale-up boards and to encourage the increase in administrative scale, we initially see two avenues.

> We argue for the explicit recognition (and definition) in the educational regulations of school boards, also in subsidised education. Such recognition implies that school boards can be financed or subsidized by the government.

This should make it possible to draw up a kind of legal position for school boards and to create a framework of 'good governance' that school boards must comply with. This framework must be based on the principle of subsidiarity. This means that every decision is made at the lowest level where it can be made in an efficient and professional manner, i.e. as close to the classroom floor as possible.[283] In that context, we see three levels: the government, the school board and the school (management).

In that context, it is very important that the school boards are properly organised and work professionally. The composition of a school board guarantees the presence of a wide range of relevant expertise (pedagogy, finances, infrastructure, welfare and personnel policy, regulations, etc.) and the members of a school board are also willing to undergo regular training in their field and in relevant educational matters.

> In order to attract administrators with relevant experience and expertise, it is recommended that a school board can decide to pay the principals and/or the managing principal a limited fee from the operating funds.

> The Committee also advocates the abolition of the formal 'communities of schools' and the transfer of their responsibilities in the field of personnel policy to the school boards.

This transfer is more easily achievable because of the involvement of the staff at the level of the school board and the abolition of the reassignment that goes with it.[284] With the transfer of this competence, the resources that currently go to the formal communities of schools will also be allocated to the upscaled school boards. It is also necessary to examine at what level the

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[282] Cf. Chapter 6.

[283] *Ibid.*

[284] Cf. The section on permanent employment and tenure

programming power of the current school communities is tied up (this could be done, for example, at the LOP).

Chapter 10. Strategic personnel and welfare policy

In recent decades, many social sectors and organisations have worked on strategic personnel and welfare policies. Scientific research on human resources management has made a major contribution to this development. In this chapter, we emphasise the need to integrate strategic personnel and welfare policy into school policy. First, we explore a number of observations and developments regarding sustainable employability, workable work and innovative work organisation in education. In the end, we will look at how to develop the further development of a strategic personnel and welfare policy, a necessary condition for stronger schools and a higher attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Sustainable employability and workable work

In the introductory chapters, the challenge of attracting sufficient teachers of quality, other staff members and school leaders in a tight labour market and keeping them motivated to work (retention) was already discussed. Sustainable employability and workable work are important levers that refer to the added value for the school and the added value for the individual staff members. They are inextricably linked.

Workable work is defined by the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) as work that does not make you overworked or ill, that is engaging and motivating, offers opportunities to keep up and learn and leaves enough room for family and private life. To assess the workability of work, the SERV uses the workability monitor, which covers four workability indicators, namely work stress (psychological strain), motivation (well-being and involvement), learning opportunities and work-life balance.[285] In addition, the following risk factors are also taken into account: work pressure, emotional strain, task variation, autonomy, support for the manager and physical strain.

In 0 we have presented the results of the most recent workability measurement of the SERV.[286] Although these results are very encouraging, we must approach them with caution: the positive score of the education sector in the survey is not necessarily the score of specific schools. The school management is a crucial factor in this.

> It is very important to focus on workable work in schools, because the situation in that area has an immediate impact on sustainable employability: staff members with workable work remain healthy and motivated for longer. Workable work has a beneficial effect on staff retention.

The 5 determining factors

A frequently used framework in this context is that of the 5 determining factors (work organisation, work content, terms of employment, working conditions and employment

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[285] Bourdeaud'hui, R., Janssens, F., Vanderhaeghe S. (2019). *Werkbaarheidsprofiel onderwijssector 2019. Sectorale analyse op de Vlaamse werkbaarheidsmonitor 2004 – 2019* https://www.serv.be/sites/default/files/documenten/StIA20200302_WBM2019_Onderwijs_RAP.pdf; Bourdeaud'hui, R., Janssens, F., & Vanderhaeghe, S. (2004). Werkbaar werk in Vlaanderen? SERV-STV-Innovatie&Arbeid ontwikkelt werkbaarheidsmonitor om arbeidskwaliteit op de Vlaamse arbeidsmarkt op te volgen. *Over.Werk. Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt WAV*, 14(3). Leuven: Acco.

[286]   See the paragraph on workability of the job.

relationships) that are described in welfare legislation as factors that are associated with psychosocial risks (such as stress and burnout).[287] *Job demands* and *job resources* can be situated at the level of the 5 determining factors.[288] The importance of these factors can also be linked to the personnel practices within strategic personnel policy. Specifically, the 5 determining factors are:[289]

- Work organisation: the way in which work is distributed (e.g. division of labour, management style). This specifically affects, among other things, the distribution of job assignments in personnel practice.
- Work content: the nature and level of the work, the way in which tasks are performed (e.g. complexity, variety, clarity). This specifically affects, among other things, the job assignment of tasks in personnel practice.
- Terms of employment: the agreements between supervisor and employees about the conditions under which work is performed (e.g. in-service training opportunities, evaluation). This specifically touches on human resources practices, professional development and personnel evaluation, among other things.
- Working conditions: the physical and climatic conditions in which the work is carried out (e.g. classroom design, ergonomics). Among other things, this specifically affects staff practice, appreciation and remuneration (e.g. furnishing a pleasant teacher's classroom as a sign of appreciation).
- Employment relationships: the way in which managers and employees interact with each other (e.g. management and colleagues). Of course, this is also important in strategic personnel policy, as school leaders have responsibility here.

On the basis of the 5 determining factors, it can be mapped out what the energy wasters and energy givers are for teachers and what can therefore be used through personnel policy (including welfare policy). On the basis of the international literature, the most common energy wasters (*Job Demands*) (Table 4) and energy givers, (*Job Resources*) (Table 5) in education can be determined.[290]

This model provides a useful framework for school leaders to monitor the quality of staffing and welfare policies in schools. School leaders and boards should be encouraged to implement effective personnel and human resources policies that motivate teachers and focus on sustainable employability and workable work. This is an essential prerequisite for developing a high-quality culture that is necessary for the attractiveness of the teaching profession and the education sector as a whole.

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[287] Art. I.1-4, 7° Codex Welzijn op het Werk

[288] In a current research project this model is used to frame the entry and dropout in the education profession.

[289] Tuytens, M., Devos, G., Vanblaere, B., Moens, M, Depoorter, A., Vandaele, F. (2021). *Psychosociaal welzijnsbeleid als onderdeel van strategisch personeelsbeleid in scholen. Wetenschappelijk rapport.* Gent: Universiteit Gent & Arteveldehogeschool. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestanden/RapportWelzijnsbeleid.pdf

[290] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

ENERGY WASTERS				
Labour organisation	**Work content**	**Terms of employment**	**Working conditions**	**Employment relations**
Workload Pressure Accountability	Administration Emotional tasks Lack of autonomy Changes in curriculum Conflicting roles Too many expectations of the role of a teacher	Salary Job insecurity Lack of professional development Evaluation of teachers	Student Behaviour Class size Lack of educational resources Lack of necessary facilities Technology	Lack of support from colleagues Lack of support from the supervisor Lack of parental involvement Lack of communication

Table 4. Most common energy wasters in education

ENERGY GIVERS				
Labour organisation	**Work content**	**Terms of employment**	**Working conditions**	**Employment relations**
Positive school climate Culture of collaboration Innovation	Autonomy Ability	Opportunities for professional development Recognition and reward Mentors Job security Supervision Feedback	Physical environment Student Behaviour Facilities and resources	Support from colleagues Support from supervisor Student-Teacher Relationship Support from others Parent-Teacher Relationship Interpersonal relationship

Table 5. Most common energy givers in education

Within the reference framework for educational quality, an effective personnel policy that is integral and coherent is put forward as a quality expectation for schools. Research has also shown that such a personnel policy in Flemish schools is related to a higher orientation towards learning among teachers and more opportunities for learning for teachers offered by the school.[291] In addition, in schools with a strategic-development-oriented personnel policy, we see a higher well-being and a lower turnover intention among teachers.[292]

In such cases there is no hierarchy or self-management, but nested self-management in which autonomy is stimulated, but also the necessary support is offered within a clear vision that has been developed in a participatory way. Here, too, research shows that in schools with a more

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[291] Tuytens, M., Vekeman, E. & Devos, G. (2020). *Stimulerende factoren voor het professioneel leren van leerkrachten in relatie tot strategisch personeelsbeleid binnen scholen.* Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12876

[292] Vekeman, E., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020). Belangrijke job demands en job resources in relatie tot het welbevinden en de verloopintentie van leerkrachten. Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/documenten/bestand.ashx?nr=12875

strategic-development-oriented personnel policy, school leaders focus on providing structure to their teachers, in addition to supporting a professional learning community among teachers. These school leaders also explicitly see this as a strategy to promote well-being among their teachers.[293]

Innovative work organisation

An innovative work organisation can play an important role in strategic personnel and welfare policy by increasing staff involvement. Based on the model for integrated organisational design developed by Workitects (formerly Flanders Synergy),[294] Van Acker and Demaertelaere have elaborated the so-called temple model of integral school organisation (see **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**).[295] The seven pillars (stairs and pillars) of the organisation's temple model pave the way for a new behavior in the organisation:

1. Let employees help discover the vision of the organisation (and why not, help shape it).
2. Clearly formulate the core job assignments that you need to get organised.
3. Build a school structure in which employees can work in result-driven teams on the development and guidance of a group of students.
4. Develop systems to support the team.
5. Create a culture based on trust, mastery, innovation and a focus on results.
6. Give teachers (and other staff members) opportunities to further develop their talents and passion and build a balanced life, both physically, psychologically and professionally/privately.
7. Use an appropriate coaching leadership.

This temple model provides school leaders with a manageable and operationalizable framework to optimize the organisation of work.

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[293] *Ibid*

[294] https://workitects.be/innovatieve-arbeidsorganisatie

[295] Van Acker, T. & Demaertelaere, Y. (2014). *Scholen slim organiseren. Anders werken met goesting*. Tielt: Lannoo.
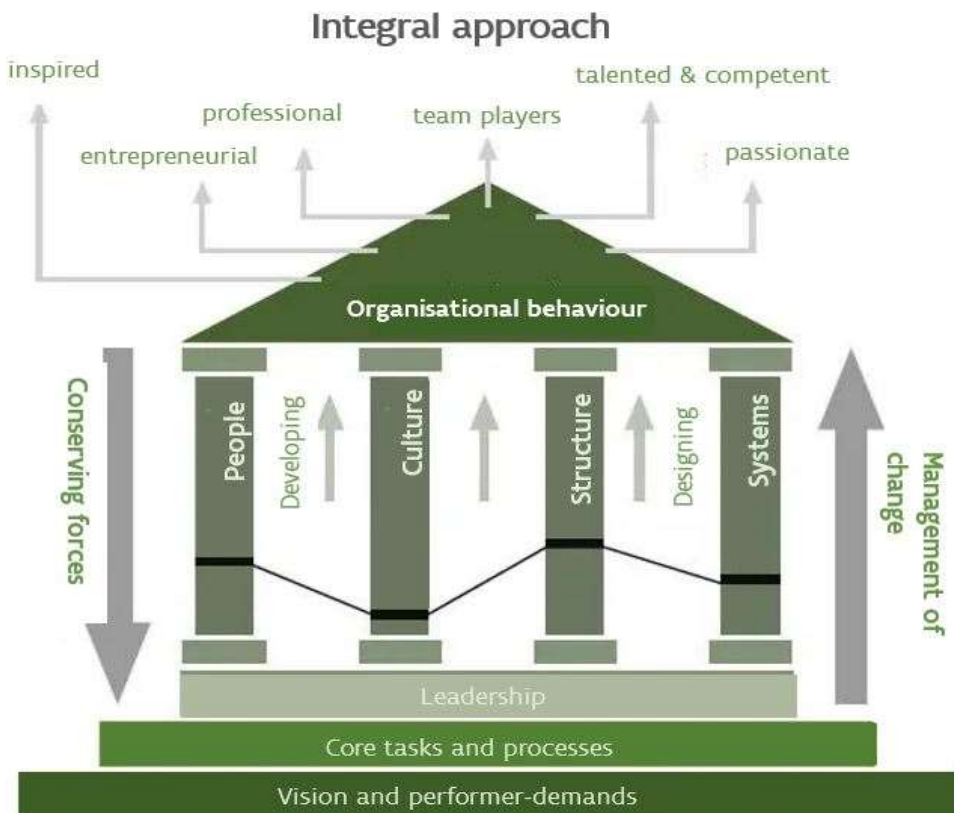
Figure 9. Temple model of integral school organisation

Responsibility of school leaders and school boards

In order to be able to apply the frameworks above in their own context, the school management and the school board are the most responsible actors.

> School leaders and school boards need generic HR competencies and knowledge in order to be able to implement a strategic personnel and welfare policy. School boards should be able to create an overall HR and welfare framework. They are also expected to be able to support and coach school leaders in this area.

School leaders need to develop the ability to communicate clearly and transparently, to build a learning organisation, to achieve an integrated work organisation, to conduct motivational interviews to stimulate behavioural change and to create a relationship of trust. In addition, they must be able to engage in difficult conversations, manage conflict situations, implement a well-being and absenteeism policy (or better a health policy), give and evaluate feedback (positive and negative, but always constructive), conduct exit interviews, and so on.

Elsewhere in this report,[296] reference has been made to the core profile for school leaders and the need to professionalise school boards. This can be an impetus to recruit school leaders and school administrators differently and to provide them with qualitative training in both pre-service and in-service, but current school leaders must also be able to master these generic HR competencies and must be able to follow a tailor-made learning path to upskill. We have also previously

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[296] Cf. Chapter 9.

proposed to abolish the pedagogical certificate of competence for school leaders, to [297] introduce a professionalisation plan for school leaders[298] and to make directorships mandates.[299] These proposals should promote the possibilities of turning school leaders into effective leaders who also possess the necessary HR expertise, among other things.

School leaders should be encouraged to voluntarily undergo an assessment and to compose, on this basis, their own development pathway. As in many other organisations, an assessment offers an opportunity to map out one's own strengths and weaknesses as a school leader and to draw up a trajectory of further training and professionalisation based on this. This should certainly not only be about formal learning, but informal learning can also be an important source of competence development.

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[297] See the section on profile.
[298] See the section on professional development.
[299] See the section on statute.

Part V. Education policy

Chapter 11. The remuneration of teachers and school leaders

As indicated earlier,[300] attractive and competitive remuneration is of course an important component of the attractiveness of the teaching job. In this chapter, we look at the remuneration of teachers and school leaders. Teachers in Flanders are well remunerated, and we are therefore not advocating a general wage increase, but rather some targeted incentives. In order to alleviate the artificial and unequitable contradictions within the teaching profession, we propose a new, integrated remuneration model. We are also calling for measures to encourage more teachers to work full-time.

Teachers' remuneration

Although higher wages are generally seen as an attractive measure to redress the imbalance between labour supply and demand and there is also research evidence that higher wages could have a positive impact on the teacher shortage, the[301] Committee does not advocate a general wage increase. As we have seen above,[302] there is no problem today as far as the competitiveness of teachers' remuneration is concerned.[303] The budgetary cost of such a measure is simply far too high. Moreover, the reasons why young people want to become teachers [304] and other research[305] show that pay is not the most important motivator for teachers.

In line with this, the Committee argues that no fringe benefits such as hospitalisation insurance, mobile phone costs or company car should be introduced in education, elements that are considered additional remuneration components in other sectors.

However, the market conformity of teachers' remuneration must be closely monitored through regular monitoring.

> The Committee does not advocate a general wage increase for teachers but recommends that the competitiveness of teachers' pay developments be better monitored by instructing the Ministry to publish a monitoring report every five years on the remuneration of teachers in comparison with relevant categories on the labour market. The monitoring should compare, on the one hand, wages and pensions, but also the benefits enjoyed by workers in other sectors (company car, etc.) on the other. In this way, the competitiveness of education compared to other sectors can be monitored. This report can then be discussed by the social partners on the occasion of the collective bargaining.

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[300] See paragraph 'The choice for the teacher profession remains principally a positive choice'.

[301] De Witte, K., De Cort, W. en Gambi, L. (2023).

[302] Cf. paragraph on remuneration.

[303] This does not take into account the added benefits enjoyed by employers in other sectors.

[304] Cf. **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**

[305] Moens, M., Depoorter, A., Vandaele, F., Vanblaere, B., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2022). *Psychosociaal welzijnsbeleid als onderdeel van strategisch personeelsbeleid in scholen*. Wetenschappelijk rapport

Targeted financial incentives

If a general wage increase is a very expensive and ineffective measure, then targeted financial incentives are much more effective and less expensive to solve certain bottlenecks. At the moment, two types of financial incentives could be effective against the teacher shortage: a wage supplement for teachers in certain subjects or domains and a wage supplement for teachers in schools with certain school characteristics.

Many countries are considering salary supplements for teachers in certain content domains, for example STEM or foreign languages, where there are relatively large shortages. The scientific evidence for financial incentives in hard-to-staff domains is fairly convincing.[306] However, this does not seem to be very opportune for the Flemish situation. The shortages have spread to almost all disciplines. For a number of months now, VDAB has omitted the specification of subjects for secondary school teachers, which means that all teachers in primary education and in any subject in secondary education are therefore a shortage profession. In those circumstances, such a financial incentive makes little sense.

For the second financial incentive, things are different. As already discussed, the teacher shortage is not the same in all schools, but schools with many disadvantaged pupils or in a disadvantaged environment suffer relatively more. As illustrated by FigureFigure 1 In this report, there is also a strong imbalance in the allocation of experienced teachers. In those circumstances, a targeted financial incentive to schools with certain school characteristics may well be an effective measure. Research shows that such incentives can not only be positive for attracting and retaining teachers but can also have a positive effect on the quality of education in schools with high levels of disadvantage.[307]

In the Netherlands, the government has introduced a 'labour market allowance' for staff in schools with a relatively large number of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage.[308] This measure was introduced in the context of the covid pandemic but becomes structural from 1 January 2024. All staff in the schools who meet the conditions benefit from this allowance. The school board and the school management do have the option to use some flexibility in the allocation of the allowance after local social negotiations.[309]

> The Committee recommends that a labour market allowance be introduced in Flanders for teachers and other staff of schools that score high in GOK indicators. In this way, a financial incentive is introduced that motivates teachers to teach in these schools. In this way, the GOK policy is expanded from a policy that provides extra funding for schools to the remuneration policy of teachers. After local social consultation, the school board and school management can use application modalities adapted to the local situation.

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[306] De Witte et al. (2023).

[307] *Ibid.*; Backers, L., Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2020). *Het aantrekken en behouden van leraren in een grootstedelijke context.* Steunpunt Onderwijsonderzoek, Gent.

[308] https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2022-17722.html;

[309] Application modalities can be found on: https://www.nponderwijs.nl/over-het-nationaal-programma-onderwijs/faq/arbeidsmarkttoelage

Diploma or function-remuneration

Education is pre-eminently a sector that is highly regulated on the basis of diplomas. It is a public sector, with extensive regulations, which sees diplomas as one of its most important outputs. In that context, diploma remuneration is a historically developed reality that has been accepted as a self-evident reality.

Nevertheless, there are many questions to be asked about diploma remuneration because it does not provide the most effective incentives for a strong and quality-oriented human resources policy. Remuneration then depends on the qualification someone has obtained, not on the specific position in which someone is employed. A diploma remuneration is also very rigid and does not allow the remuneration to be differentiated according to the actual competences of staff, their performance or their professional development. Diploma remuneration restricts employers' ability to build incentives into remuneration for better performance and competence development. In the private sector, there are strong trends to move from diploma remuneration to function remuneration, accompanied with trends towards differentiated remuneration and performance-based remuneration.

The Committee takes the position that a radical switch to function remuneration in education is not opportune at this time and would have too many dysfunctional effects. But in the medium term, opportunities should be sought to evolve towards function remuneration.

Currently, diploma remuneration generates inequalities and status differences between teachers doing the same work, distinctly so in the second stage of secondary education, which is difficult to justify. In the long term, it is advisable to leave behind the old inequalities based on diploma differences, to take the step towards job remuneration and to give schools more opportunities to negotiate wage formation within certain frameworks.

An integrated remuneration system

In the meantime, diploma remuneration remains an important pillar of the remuneration system in education, but we can find ways to mitigate its disadvantages and to allow competence development to play a stronger role in remuneration. We can do this by introducing an integrated remuneration system. The starting point is to move away from different, diploma-based salary scales. This will reduce artificial differences between different categories of teachers on the basis of their qualifications.

The proposal for an integrated remuneration system that is elaborated below is also in line with the proposal to abandon the differences between teachers based on diplomas in secondary education and thus allow educational bachelors and masters to function side by side throughout secondary education.[310] It is up to the school management to recruit the most appropriate profile.

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[310] See paragraph 'Proof of subject-specific competence'.

> There will be a single salary scale for a qualified teacher, regardless of the level of education or the type of education in which the teacher is recruited.[311] Supplements are added to this basic salary when the teacher meets certain conditions:
> 1. On the basis of qualifications (not cumulative):
>   1.1. if the demonstrated subject-specific (at least 30 credits) and associated subject-related didactic competence (at least 12 credits, teaching methodology and 6 credits, internship) is situated at master's level.[312]
>   1.2. if the demonstrated specific pedagogical-didactic and subject-specific didactic knowledge (minus 60 credits) is situated at master's level.[313]
> 2. Based on recruitment as a senior teacher.[314]
> 3. On the basis of the labour market allowance based on specific school characteristics.[315]

A few examples may help clarify this logic:
- There will be no automatic remuneration of teachers with a master's degree in primary education on the current salary scale of a master's degree (salary scale 501), but primary schools can, if they wish, create positions in which teachers take on policy tasks in addition to their classroom tasks, for which they can recruit teachers with a specific master's degree[316] who will then receive a supplement to their basic salary (situation 1.2).
- Professional bachelor's graduates who work in the second stage of secondary education can upgrade their professional competence to master's level via adapted pathways offered by universities and receive a supplement to their basic remuneration (situation 1.1).
- A teacher who has been recruited with a master's qualification for a teaching position that requires it and receives a supplement for it (situation 1.1) may receive a second supplement when appointed as a senior teacher (situation 2).
- A teacher who, on the basis of pedagogical knowledge, is employed in a policy position in a primary school (situation 1.2) with specific school characteristics (situation 3) receives a double supplement.

Schools are held accountable for the financial consequences of their wage policy. In the envelope system of points that is proposed further on,[317] the functions to which the above regulation applies are given a higher weight. In this way, schools are stimulated to pursue a well-considered personnel policy, in which choices have to be made. This is not only the consequence of school autonomy, but also offers schools the opportunity to develop policies adapted to the local situation.

Teachers who are in an induction year[318] can receive the basic salary for a maximum of two years. During the induction year(s), the teacher with a master's qualification will receive all the supplement provided for in situation 1.1. A teacher may also receive the supplement provided for in situation 3 during the induction year(s).

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[311] At the moment this is salary scale 301.

[312] See paragraph 'Proof of subject-specific competence'.

[313] See paragraph 'The learning ladder for primary education'.

[314] See paragraph on senior teachers.

[315] See paragraph on targeted financial incentives.

[316] As stipulated in the paragraph on the learning ladder for primary education.

[317] See paragraph on personnel funding.

[318] See paragraph 'The induction year'.

As discussed earlier, the [319] seniority allowance is linked to the fulfilment of the periodic training obligation.

> The Flemish Government has already made significant efforts to honour the seniority of side-entrants in education. The Committee proposes to take a final step in this direction by allowing new side-entrants to transfer up to a maximum of 20 years of seniority from their previous work experience to a job in education.

Remuneration of school leaders

In view of the gravity and complexity of the task of school leaders, a high-performance and market-based remuneration is necessary. Only then will we succeed in attracting strong profiles in education.

> In order to make the job of school leader attractive to teachers, it is also necessary that there is a certain wage tension between the salary of the teacher and that of the principal. The Committee welcomes the fact that the most recent CBA XIII has increased the wage gap between the salary of teacher and that of principal to 31% with the promise to move up to 35%. That 35% seems to be the absolute minimum for the Committee.

Encouraging full-time work

As stated earlier,[320] 38.5% of primary school teachers and 35.9% of secondary school teachers work part-time, a higher frequency than in other sectors. By working part-time, teachers usually strive for a better work-life *balance* and a time organisation in which different tasks and aspirations can be reconciled. The relatively high frequency of part-time work in education is related to the feminisation of the teaching profession, stereotypes about women's work, but also to the fact that women take on care and family responsibilities more frequently than men. The lack of childcare provision also has a stimulating impact on part-time work.

However, there is hardly any discussion about the consequences of part-time work in education. Part-time work in education has a negative impact on the provision of teachers on the labour market and thus exacerbates the teacher shortage. From a pedagogical point of view and for integration into school and teacher teams, part-time work is not ideal. Part-time teachers are also less likely to be active in professional development.[321]

Part-time work also has adverse consequences for the persons concerned. Part-time teachers have fewer opportunities to advance in the job or into managerial positions. It makes women economically vulnerable in the event of divorce or other important events in the life course.[322] The widespread idea that part-time workers experience less stress or absenteeism has been

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[319] See paragraph on professional development.

[320] See paragraph 'Characteristics of the teacher population'.

[321] Beaton, F. (2017). Just in time and future-proofing? Policy, challenges and opportunities in the professional development of part-time teachers, *International Journal for Academic Development*, 22:1, 19-30. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.1261354

[322] Adema, Y., Folmer, K., Rabaté, S., Visser, D. & Vlekke, M. (2019). *Arbeidsparticipatie, gewerkte uren en economische zelfstandigheid van vrouwen*. CPB: Den Haag. https://www.cpb.nl/sites/default/files/omnidownload/cpb-notitie-economische-zelfstandigheid-vrouwen_fin2.pdf

debunked by research; the reverse is true: part-time workers report more stress and absenteeism than full-time workers.[323]

Research in the Netherlands has shown that there is potential for part-time teachers, especially in primary education, to increase their workload provided that their needs concerning time usage are taken into account in the organisation of work and their job assignment.[324] A more flexible interpretation of teachers' job assignments[325] creates opportunities to convince them to take on a larger job assignment or even to work full-time. The volume of employment no longer has to be expressed in the number of 'hours' of teaching .

On the other hand, it must also be recognised that there is a general trend in society and in the labour market towards greater flexibility in the organisation of work, including an increase in part-time work. Combined careers are also more common. In education, 'hybrid' careers are an attractive prospect for practical teachers, combining a job in the business world with a job as a teacher.[326] Especially in technical and vocational programmes, teachers who are up to date with innovation in the labour market are an asset. They can integrate technological evolutions into their lessons.

However, there are important preconditions attached to encouraging part-time teachers to take on a larger job assignment or to work full-time, in the first place for childcare. Taxation also often plays an important role, as the marginal financial gain in income becomes small in many situations. The social consequences, including in the field of informal care, must also be taken into account.

All in all, it still makes sense to encourage full-time work among teachers in order to stimulate labour participation and optimise the functioning of school teams.

Encouraging part-time teachers to take on a larger job assignment or to work full-time is not a simple matter. In dialogue with social partners and stakeholders, it is necessary to figure out what the best strategies are and to work in an evidence-informed manner, for example by looking at proven good practices at home and abroad. A fairly far-reaching measure could be the introduction of a full-time bonus.[327]

> The Committee recommends that the issue of part-time work in education be put on the agenda, that research into effective strategies be launched and that the appropriate approach be sought in consultation and dialogue with the social partners and the education sector, taking into account those situations in which combining part-time work in education and part-time work in industry is an added value.

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[323] Vernet (2021). *Meer werken, minder verzuim: wens of werkelijkheid.*
https://www.pggm.nl/media/xm2jsxwk/2021-meer-werken-minder-verzuim_wens-of-werkelijkheid.pdf

[324] Van Hassel, D. & Wisse, R. (2022). *Deeltijdwerken in het primair onderwijs. Verkenning naar deeltijdwerken en de mogelijkheden om een groter contract te stimuleren*. Arbeidsmarktplatform PO: Den Haag. https://avs.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Verkenning-Deeltijdwerken-in-het-primair-onderwijs-2022.pdf

[325] See paragraph A new definition of the job assignment of teachers.

[326] See the paragraph 'Specific attention for teachers in vocational education'.

[327] Cf. the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2022). *Start werving kopgroep voltijdbonus/ meerurenbonus in sector onderwijs.*
https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2022/11/07/start-werving-kopgroep-voltijdbonus-meerurenbonus-in-sector-onderwijs

Leave systems and career breaks

It is an often heard and justified complaint from starters in education that many appointed teachers occupy a position without effectively taking up their job. On the one hand, this creates job insecurity for starters and temporary teachers in general, and on the other hand, it is necessary that as many appointed teachers as possible continue to work in order to limit the teacher shortage. To this end, the Committee is proposing a number of measures relating to leave systems and teacher absences.

Currently, there are no less than 22 different leave systems in education. This is a whole tangle of leaves with various conditions, durations and commencement dates. Needless to say, this is not very transparent, both for the school board as an employer and for the staff. A critical examination of the merits is therefore necessary with the aim of cutting back on the number of leave systems. This is best done in consultation with the social partners and representatives of teachers and school leaders.

In addition, the Committee proposes two measures concerning the impact of leave of absence on permanent appointments.

The first is that the position as teacher remains valid for a maximum of 2 years, when the teacher leaves education to work in another sector. After 2 years, the teacher either returns to teaching or resigns.

The second measure is that, when a full-time appointed teacher starts working part-time, the full-time appointment remains valid for a maximum of 5 years, provided that the part-time job assignment is at least 50%. If the part-time job assignment is less than 50%, the full-time appointment will automatically expire after 2 years. In both cases, the teacher retains the appointment only for the volume actually performed.

Chapter 12. Funding and rationalisation

Education in Flanders is well funded but is confronted with major inefficiencies that mean that funding is not always used efficiently and often gives the wrong incentives. In this chapter, we look at the financing of compulsory education. We advocate a new funding methodology that makes schools accountable, based on an envelope mechanism. This new methodology should also encourage schools to rationalise their study programmes. We also argue in favour of correcting the imbalance between personnel expenditure and operating funds in the long term.

Open-end financing

There are three main funding streams in compulsory education: the payment of the salaries of teaching staff by AGODI (the Agency for Educational Services), the operating funds for the schools and the financing and subsidisation of the school infrastructure.

For the staff and operating funds, this is *open-end* financing, i.e. the expenditure follows the evolution of the number of pupils. This system has the great advantage that the operating and personnel resources that schools receive per pupil do not fluctuate depending on the total pupil population in Flanders and that schools therefore know their staff and operating resources before the start of the school year. This certainly benefits the HR policy of the schools and the job security of the staff. The latter is made possible by the fact that the calculation basis for this is the number of pupils on 1st of February of the previous school year.

> The Committee advocates that the open-ended funding for staff and operating funds as it exists today should be fully maintained.

Personnel funding

In both primary and secondary education, the current staffing system is characterised by great complexity, both in the method of calculating the personnel envelope and in the colouring of resources for, for example, induction, support for the core tasks and the 'making school together' initiative. Colouring these resources creates significant inefficiencies, as school leaders look for ways to allocate budgets to these funding streams and this is not always done in the most efficient way. Colouring also creates additional administration and infringes on school autonomy. In order to increase transparency and efficiency, it is therefore best to develop a new transparent and rational funding model for all staff resources that schools currently receive.

Secondary schools are currently only allowed to use 96.57% of the resources they generate on the basis of their pupil numbers. In the context of transparency, it is an obvious step that this constraint should disappear. What was introduced decades ago as a cost-saving measure must be regarded as a structural measure given its long duration. Moreover, it is not realistic to assume that the staff envelope in secondary education has room for growth, as we find that it is already very generous compared to other countries.

> The Committee proposes a new approach to staff resources management that abolishes the limited take-up rate in secondary education and restores the numerator to 100%, on the understanding that the current 96.57% will be converted to 100%. This has already happened in primary education in 2012. It is best to completely remove the instrument of take-up rates from the policy toolbox.

All proposals within the new funding model that is introduced here are aimed at giving schools and school boards an optimal opportunity to draw up their own HR policy tailored to their needs and depending on the context in which the schools operate. This possibility, in turn, can have a direct positive impact on the quality of education offered by the schools.

Envelope funding

The Committee is of the opinion that envelope funding for staff is the best way to achieve transparent funding that will enable schools and school boards to use staff resources as efficiently as possible according to local needs and contexts and thus to pursue a contemporary HR policy. In the envelope, all staff-related funding and subsidy flows to schools are decolorized and merged. This envelope is allocated to the school boards, which in turn distribute it among their schools. A condition for this is that the increase in scale of school boards can be continued.

This envelope contains all personnel resources, including the resources that are currently allocated to schools for specific purposes such as induction, trade union work, reception of foreign-speaking newcomers, ICT and GOK.

The Committee is calling for a complete decolourisation of all resources. This means that schools and school boards are given a great deal of autonomy in this area and are responsible for the use of these resources. It is therefore self-evident that the school boards are accountable to their stakeholders and to the government on a regular basis for the use of staff resources and the policy choices that are made. This autonomy should enable schools and school boards to pursue a personnel policy tailored to the needs of each school.

The staff envelope consists of 2 large sub-envelopes. The former can be used to appoint teachers and other staff who have a direct impact on the classroom and the students, such as student counsellors, coaches, tutors and educators. The second (smaller) envelope is used for managerial staff, the facilitating services such as accounting, personnel policy and HR, prevention, purchasing, small infrastructure and management. The advantage of this dichotomy is that the resources that the government has intended for the classroom also effectively go to the pupils and the didactic-pedagogical process at a school.

However, the dividing line between these two envelopes must not be absolute. This means that it must be possible to make limited transfers from one envelope to another if this is necessary due to specific circumstances or a special context. However, it can never be the intention to create too much overhead in the schools themselves or at an upper school level. The school board must have a transparent and substantiated policy on this. This means that the transfer of funds from one envelope to another must always be the subject of social dialogue.

The school must report transparently on the spending of the staff envelopes so that the government and the taxpayer have insight into the allocation and spending of these public funds.[328]

This also implies that during audits, the Inspectorate always checks the use of the staff envelopes and pays particular attention to the expediency and impact of transfers between the sub-envelopes.

The school boards receive the staff envelope for their schools in the form of points. With these points, they can appoint staff members. The point weight of each member of staff depends on the position they perform, and the remuneration associated with it.

For example, a teacher with a bachelor's degree in primary education will take fewer points than a teacher with a master's degree with policy responsibility in primary education.[328] It is the government that determines how many points each post represents. It is advisable not to create an inflation of types of posts, but to give the schools a large degree of freedom in the filling of posts, especially when it comes to the positions in the facility management of a school board. For example, it makes little sense to create a separate position for prevention adviser in addition to a separate position for accountant. These posts are all the responsibility of the administrative support staff. It is the freedom and responsibility of the schools and school boards to choose which posts to use and which functions to create, depending on their own needs, and so the schools can shape their own HR policy. For example, primary school A can choose to use 2 masters of primary education and use points from the envelope for this, while primary school B chooses not to appoint any master's in primary education.

Within the staff envelope, a maximum percentage of tenured staff members of 80% is determined at the level of the school board.[330]

A transition period will be built in for schools that are currently above that limit. This maximum percentage should allow schools to pursue a forward-looking personnel policy. This maximum limit is also intended to ensure that there is job security within the school board for permanent staff members, which is all the more important because permanent staff members are generally not always entitled to benefits in the absence of employment. If, however, permanent staff are no longer able to take up a position within the school board due to large pupil declines in a school or in certain fields of study, that staff member must be able to turn to a Flemish allocation committee that offers the staff member a position in another school board within a reasonable distance. This allocation committee works in a different way than the current Flemish job reassignment committee, because the receiving school board is also actively involved in the recruitment of the staff member who has become redundant in another board.

The Ministry of Education and Training will continue to take on the social secretariat function for staff in education and pay the salaries of the staff members, as is the case today. The so-called third-party payer system will therefore continue to exist.

Although the social secretariat function could in principle be called upon by specialized companies, the current system offers the advantages of scale and user-friendliness. However, this function of the government should be evaluated at regular intervals in terms of efficiency and user-friendliness. The Committee's proposals will result in simpler and more manageable regulation, so that cost and efficiency will be better than is the case today.

Structure of the staff envelope

The staff envelope for a school is built up on the basis of school characteristics and pupil characteristics and also includes the resources for the replacement of sick and absent staff members.

School characteristics

School characteristics are, for example, the range of programmes, the size of the school and the location of the school (in primary education, for example, pupils from schools in sparsely populated areas are currently given a weighting of 1.05).

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[328] See paragraph 'The learning ladder for primary education'.

As far as the study programmes aspect is concerned, there is currently a different weighting of coefficients in secondary education, depending on the type of education and the group of pupils. For example, the coefficient for a programme in the second stage of labour market-oriented education (i.e. vocational education) is higher than that for the 2nd stage of study programmes with higher education orientation (i.e. in academic tracks). These differences are certainly understandable given the differences in the composition of pupil groups and in curriculum structure, and the needs that go hand in hand with it.

As far as the location of the school is concerned, there is an additional weighting for pupils in schools in sparsely populated areas and in the Brussels-Capital Region. For example, pupils in a primary school in a sparsely populated area are given a weighting of 1.05. In the first stage of secondary education, this is 1.10. The weighting factors should be determined on the basis of proper research.

The third aspect is the size of the school. Today, the calculation formula for the staff resources is characterized by a high degree of digression. School size therefore has a (too) big impact on the calculation of the staffing today. As a result of this degressive method of calculation, a primary school of 400 pupils currently receives about 10% fewer teaching hours per pupil than a primary school of 100 pupils, and in secondary education this difference even rises to 12 to 15%. Small schools are therefore given relatively more advantageous resources than larger schools and this sometimes leads to artificial division of schools, which does not benefit transparency, neither for the pupils nor for the staff.

The Committee proposes to move towards a less degressive calculation formula. This will not only discourage undesirable effects such as artificial school splits but can also be an incentive to grow towards a more rational programme offer.

In the context of the 'Broad Flemish Reconsideration', a model has already been developed with accompanying simulation.[329] We propose to take this model as a starting point.

After all, in such a context, a more limited range of courses with the same number of pupils will generate no less support than an extensive range of courses. If less degressivity is built in, further thought must be given to a good operationalisation that does not jeopardise the existence of smaller schools, especially when it comes to more rural local primary schools. This could include the introduction of a basic base of staff resources for each school, which should not be too bulky, so that degressivity does not creep into the system in any other way. The best way to operationalise this should be considered at a later stage.

A less degressive framework is not only an incentive to rationalise but can also lead to a more efficient and cheaper operationalisation of free choice. In this context, the Committee also advocates the abolition of the current minimum packages in secondary education. These minimum packages were created to guarantee freedom of choice, but they sometimes miss the mark.

To guarantee free choice, one can think of the allocation of a limited package of personnel resources to guarantee free choice, a so-called free choice package that is allocated to the central level of official education (GO! – OVSG – POV) and distributed from there according to needs.

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[329] https://fin.vlaanderen.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Eindrapport_OV_Geredigeerd.pdf

Pupil's characteristics

The weighting of pupil characteristics will continue to be based on the GOK scheme as it is currently developed and integrated in primary education. For secondary education, this means that the exercise that was carried out in 2012 for primary education will also be carried out for secondary education and that both the SES characteristics with the respective weightings and the global range of resources for this purpose will be studied in order to determine the share of pupil characteristics in the envelope and their allocation.

The decolourisation of the GOK resources does not in any way mean that schools should not implement an efficient policy to professionally supervise and guide pupils with SES characteristics. Indeed, an audit by the Court of Audit has shown that these resources are not always used effectively.[330] Schools must also be able to explicitly justify their equal educational opportunities policy, without this having to lead to administrative burden.

The labour market allowance for teaching staff in schools that score high on the GOK indicators [331] is financed separately and is therefore not taken out of the GOK funding. After all, the purpose of this is to provide more teaching staff to these schools, and we do not want to abolish this. The labour market allowance therefore does not give rise to higher point weights for this staff.

Replacements

The third component of the staff envelope is allocated for the replacement of absent staff.

A percentage is provided in the staff envelope for the replacements of absent staff members. This percentage provided for the replacements is fixed and is calculated on the basis of the current volume of replacements at the Flemish level. This means that the deployment and cost of replacements and the organisation of replacements will become the integral responsibility of schools and school boards and that they will have to draw up an efficient and responsible policy for this.

If schools and school boards want to pursue their own HR policy tailored to their schools, the inclusion of replacements in the staff envelope is a necessary condition. After all, a personnel policy adapted to the needs of each school can only contain a vision of how to deal with absent staff members, and the non-inclusion of replacement funds in the staff envelope would therefore be a serious limitation to the implementation of an efficient personnel policy. It is therefore up to the school boards and the schools and not the government to decide how to deal with the absence of staff members.

This integration does mean that the personnel replacements are evolving from *open-end* financing to a semi-closed envelope. That is why it is important that the calculation of these resources is based on the average substitutes of the last 5 years at macro level and that the resources and needs are monitored every 5 years to ensure that no adjustments are necessary. The total volume of replacements at the Flemish level is distributed among each school in proportion to the share of each school in the total points envelope at the Flemish level. The envelope per school does evolve along with the normal points envelope that is built up on the

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[330] Rekenhof (2017). *Gelijke onderwijskansen in het basisonderwijs.* Verslag goedgekeurd in de Nederlandse kamer van het Rekenhof op 26 september 2017 Vlaams Parlement, 37-A (2017-2018) – Nr. 1. https://www.ccrek.be/NL/Publicaties/Fiche.html?id=a3841440-80c3-46b8-9d9d-a51fcc4b6b2c

[331] See the paragraph Targeted financial incentives.

basis of the school and pupil characteristics, i.e. if that envelope increases or decreases as a result of, for example, fluctuations in pupil numbers or new policy measures, the substitute envelope evolves to the same extent. Adding these resources to the staff envelope makes it possible for teachers to be appointed for a full school year at a time.

Rationalisation of study programmes

Courses

The (gradual) introduction of less degressive staff funding for schools will undoubtedly be a powerful stimulus to more intensive cooperation between schools and to an increase in administrative scale, but it can certainly also strongly promote the rationalisation of the study programmes in secondary education. After all, in this new funding context, it will be much less interesting to maintain a fragmented range of programmes in a school with small numbers of pupils in many different fields of study. In this way, the available expertise and therefore the quality within schools in certain fields of study can be increased and money is freed up that can be spent more efficiently in other places in education.

In order to manage the rationalisation of programmes, it is necessary to ensure a mechanism that not only rationalises but also aims at an efficient distribution of the study offer, which also guarantees and operationalises free choice.

A relatively simple way to achieve both objectives is for the government to give each field of study a label. Those labels might look like this:
- Freely programmable. Example: 1st Grade A and 1st Grade B
- Freely programmable as long as certain conditions are met. Example: 3rd grade science-mathematics, provided that the school has other academic fields of study
- Limited programmable with free choice guarantee within the education zone. Example: finishing construction (vocational out-of-school care)
- Limited programmable with free choice guarantee within Flanders. Example: dental techniques (technical)

Each course of study from the matrix is labelled in this way, and this can be done, for example, in the evaluation and adjustment of the study offer in modernised secondary education.

Denominational courses

The current regulation for denominational courses will be maintained, but for those courses that are followed by a small number of pupils in an educational zone, the course will be organised on a larger scale than the individual school. Depending on the context and the distances, this can be organised per city or per educational zone or by means of distance learning.

Operating resources

In addition to the staff points envelope, schools also receive an allowance for operating funds. The proposal is not to change anything at the moment, but there are two points of attention.

First of all, it is desirable that after a few years of (partial) non-indexation, the operating resources are indexed and that a growth path for increase is foreseen.

This growth path is necessary because schools in Flanders receive few operating resources compared to other countries. The objective of the growth path should be that the volume of operating resources evolves towards the average of the OECD countries in ten years' time.

In addition, it would be good to examine whether it would not be appropriate to draw up a growth path towards a more balanced relationship between the staff envelope and the operating resources than is currently the case.

Infrastructure resources

With regard to the third funding stream, the financing and subsidisation of the construction and maintenance of school infrastructure, it is clear that an effort is needed to accelerate the renewal of this infrastructure. After all, a solid and adapted school infrastructure has a positive impact on the learning performance of pupils and on job satisfaction and the appreciation of teachers.[332] However, this aspect is beyond the scope of this report.

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[332] De Witte, K. (2022). *Les in hetzelfde schoolgebouw als je betovergrootouders. Hoe een verouderde schoolinfrastructuur kan leiden tot een financiële molensteen en lagere leerprestaties.* Leuvense Economische Standpunten 196. https://feb.kuleuven.be/research/les/pdf/LES%202022_196%20-%20SCHOOLINFRASTR.pdf

Chapter 13. Conditions for high-quality teacher and school policy

In order to give priority to the professionalism of teachers and school leaders and to the effective governance of schools, public policy must create a number of conditions. Without aiming for exhaustiveness, in this chapter we emphasize the importance of *evidence-informed* teacher policy by means of sound educational research and policy evaluation research and the need for high-performance quality assurance by the inspectorate. We also advocate for strong professional organisations and a louder voice of teachers and school leaders in the policy cycle.

Evidence-informed teacher policy

Educational research

At various points throughout the report, the Committee has argued that teacher policy should be based on scientific research evidence as an essential part of the broader education policy. This report has tried to do the same. This is not the place to evaluate the state of educational research in Flanders. But it does seem to be the case that educational research in Flanders needs to be strengthened quantitatively and qualitatively in order to generate sufficient data and evidence for an evidence-informed teacher policy. Due to the discontinuation of the Policy Research Centre for Educational Research, collaboration between researchers has been hampered and there has been a gap in data collection. Long-term projects have been replaced by short, ad hoc projects on punctual themes. Fundamental educational research is scarce in Flanders, partly due to the lack of a specific Committee and subsidy route in the Fund for Scientific Research. And didactic research is underrated.

In addition to the lack of research evidence, the discontinuation of the Educational Research Policy Research Centre for Educational Research also has consequences for the development of human capital in the educational infrastructure. In order to attract more people with research competences in policy-making bodies, government and the intermediary structures of education providers and social partners, universities must be able to form them through active participation in doctoral trajectories and research teams.

> The Committee recommends the establishment of a structural, long-term and high-quality educational research programme that can provide education policy in general and teacher policy in particular with much-needed evidence.

In addition to the production of research evidence and scientific knowledge, these must also be correctly translated and communicated to the educational field and the teacher population. It has already been pointed out above that this translation and integration into one's own professional actions is far from optimal.[333] In this respect, the establishment of the Knowledge Centre Learning Point (Leerpunt) on the basis of advice from the Better Education Committee [334] is an excellent thing.[335] Expectations are high, including in the Committee.

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[333] See the paragraph *Evidence-informed* expertise.
[334] Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021). Advice 58.
[335] https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/leerpunt

> It is important to improve the flow of research evidence and scientific knowledge to schools, teachers and school leaders. Leerpunt plays a crucial role in this. However, the Committee does advocate that the broad professionalism of teachers, in which practical knowledge and craftsmanship are also very important, should be recognised and appreciated.[336]

Evaluation research

Reforms, including in education, are still rarely adequately evaluated in Flanders. There is little tradition and specific expertise in evaluation research. However, it would be a sign of good governance for new policies to first evaluate previous policy interventions. Evaluation research should be systematically included in the policy cycle. This also applies to the proposals and recommendations in this report: their implementation must be constantly evaluated.

> The Committee advocates the systematic planning and implementation of independent evaluation studies of policy initiatives.

Specific attention for teachers in vocational programmes

The upgrading of technical and vocational education is an important policy priority. The specific needs of vocational education and of the teachers who work there are often overlooked. In this report, too, we have not always had the opportunity to take full account of the specific questions that arise with regard to teachers in vocational education.

The Committee therefore endorses the plea of the Committee for Better Education to pay special attention to the specific needs of vocational education, for example by means of a States General.[336]

> The Committee calls for special attention to be paid to the important role of practical teachers, their recruitment, retention and career development. For this category of teachers, flexible employment contracts and forms of cooperation with companies are highly appropriate. Through combined careers and 'hybrid' roles, practical teachers can keep their competences permanently up to date, which benefits the quality and relevance of vocational education.

Quality assurance

To the extent that education evolves towards a system that relies on the professionalism of teachers and the policy making- capacity of schools, and less on regulations and top-down guidance by government policy and education providers, quality assurance becomes more important. High-quality internal quality assurance in schools and within education providers is inextricably linked to broad school autonomy, strong school leadership and high policy making- capacity.

In our education system, external quality assurance rests to a large extent with the education inspectorate. Due to the lack of regulation and the shift towards accountability and management of output and outcomes, the role of the inspectorate is given more weight. The introduction of the Flemish tests will also change the role of the inspectorate and make its actions more data driven. In this report, we have repeatedly referred to the need for a strong inspectorate, which monitors the way in which schools exercise their autonomy and implement the proposals and

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[336] Brinckman, P. & Versluys, K. (2021), Advies 15.

recommendations. This is the case, among others, for the following aspects that must be considered during audits:

- Evaluation of the school policy regarding the implementation of the induction year.
- Evaluation of the school's policy with regard to professionalisation and the implementation of professionalisation plans.
- Evaluation of the job assignment to teachers.
- Control of the use of the staff envelopes and in particular the opportunity and impact of transfers between the partial envelopes.

More generally, the inspectorate must also monitor the quality of the personnel and HR policy in a school and the extent to which the school creates a motivating working environment and achieves workable work. All this implies a broader, more in-depth and stronger remit for the inspection.

However, the question arises whether the composition of the inspection team is currently sufficiently multidisciplinary to be able to carry out these assessments in a qualitative manner. It will be necessary to evaluate the selection conditions for members of the Education Inspectorate and the internal operations and to adapt them to the new expectations. The Education Inspectorate must be given sufficient opportunities to recruit external experts and integrate them into its teams in order to be able to fulfil this broader task. The question is also whether the instruments currently used by the Education Inspectorate and the inspectorate's working method for school audits are sufficient to carry out the correct analysis and propose options for improvement.

> The Committee recommends that the composition and functioning of the inspectorate be reviewed in the light of the proposals and recommendations of this report and the extension of its remit that goes with it.

A stronger voice of teachers and school leaders

Professional organisations of teachers and school leaders

Compared to other countries, there are hardly any professional organisations of teachers in Flanders. Trade unions are member organisations that play an important role in social dialogue as social partners, but they are not professional organisations. However, teachers benefit from strong professional organisations that put the professional interests of the profession first. Such professional organisations cannot be set up by the public authorities, nor by the education providers, nor by the social partners, but can only be set up by the profession itself.

> The Committee calls on the professional groups of teachers and school leaders to set up their own professional organisations that can provide a powerful breeding ground for the defence of the interests and further professionalisation of teachers and school leaders.

Participation of teachers and school leaders in policy making

Flemish education has an extensive culture of consultation and negotiation. This is positive because it provides a voice for the various actors involved in policy development. However, there are a number of shortcomings in this culture of consultation. The voices of education providers and trade unions are often dominant, and teachers and school leaders can only participate

indirectly in the consultations. Moreover, the consultation hardly functions as a mechanism through which bottom-up feedback on the impact of policy on practice can flow to schools and classrooms.

As a strategic advisory council, the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) makes many commendable efforts to hear the voice of teachers and school leaders on various policy themes, but this remains based on voluntarism and coincidence. A more structural approach should be sought to represent teachers and school leaders and to allow them to participate in policy development.

> The voice of teachers and school leaders must be heard more strongly in policy development, not only through trade unions in social dialogue or in advisory councils such as VLOR, but through appropriate professional organisations. Feedback loops and information flow from the field to policy need to be better organised.

A new covenant on governance and school autonomy

The governance philosophy that this report defends, with its focus on professional teachers, autonomous schools and strong school boards, also implies a different role for the government. This is not just about regulation and the slimming down of the overly extensive education regulations, but more fundamentally about a reflection on how a complex system such as education should be managed. A democratically legitimized government has the political task of strategically managing this complex system, formulating the objectives for education, formulating the frameworks within which school policy can evolve, and monitoring the results of education. In doing so, it must consult with the various actors in the field of education and consider the feedback that comes from the field. In doing so, it must also take into account the delicate balances implied by the constitutional freedom of education.

That means no absent government or a government that directs from a distance. In some respects, the government can be expected to provide more guidance than is currently the case. In other respects, less so.

> It would be good if, after a fundamental discussion, the government and education providers could come to a kind of covenant on management and regulation, school autonomy and policy making responsibility. History, for example of the period after the School Pact of 1958, has shown that such an agreement can usher in a period of prosperity and prosperity in education.

Part VI. Conclusions

Chapter 14. Conclusions, proposals and recommendations

Overall conclusion

The main conclusion of this report is that the professionalisation of teachers, a contemporary personnel policy in schools and the strengthening of the leadership, governance and policy making-capacity of schools are key to sustainably increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In turn, all this will also contribute to better education for Flemish pupils and students.

The Committee is of the opinion that strengthening school autonomy is a prerequisite for a contemporary and effective personnel policy and that it is therefore advisable to situate teacher policy at school level and to give the school management and the school board more power. Admittedly, within a public law regulatory framework of rights and obligations that are the same for everyone, but with greater regulatory flexibility than is currently the case.

Overview of proposals and recommendations

In this section, we reiterate the proposals and recommendations made by the Committee in the previous chapters. For more detailed argumentation and explanation, please refer to the relevant chapters. We list the proposals and recommendations in the order in which they were discussed in this report.

The Committee stresses that the proposals and recommendations should not be seen in isolation from each other. Many are interrelated, mutually reinforcing, or even desperately needed to implement other proposals.

The candidate teacher

Encouraging a positive study choice to become a teacher.

The choice to become a teacher should again be seen as a positive choice. The idea that the choice of study for a teacher is not the best choice must be resolutely corrected. The Pupil Guidance Centres, but especially teachers and schools themselves, which have a major impact on pupils' choice of study, have an enormous responsibility in this regard. It is in schools themselves that students can be motivated to make a positive choice for the teaching profession.

More diversity in the teaching profession by lifting the ban on religious symbols for teachers.

The Committee argues that the ban on external philosophical or religious signs for teachers in education should be abolished so that this barrier to tapping into talent among young people from various religious backgrounds can be removed.

Introduction of the learning ladder in primary education.

In order to broaden the scope for the teaching profession in primary education and at the same time to value the pursuit of social advancement, a learning ladder is introduced. The intention is that at each step of the Flemish Qualification Structure (VKS) 5 to 7 teacher training courses for primary education will be offered. Schools obviously have the freedom to decide for themselves on the composition of their teams.

Multidisciplinary teams in schools.

We consistently advocate defining the professionalism of teachers as members of a multidisciplinary team.

Focus on subject-specific and didactic training.

The Committee argues for a strong focus in teacher training on the subject-specific and associated didactic training. Both are also linked to each other and require sufficient space in the study programmes.

Regular evaluation and update of professional profile and basic competencies.

The Committee recommends that the professional profile and basic competences be regularly evaluated, in consultation with the teacher training programmes and the declining educational field, and that adjustments be made if necessary.

The starting teacher

Teachers affect school boards.

The Committee proposes that teachers should not be appointed to the schools, but to the school boards. This facilitates a wider and more interesting employability, both from the point of view of the staff member and the school board.

Recruitment of a teacher, as a rule, for one school year.

As a rule, a new teacher is recruited at the beginning of a school year and for one full school year, except in the case of replacements. This ensures stability and job security for the staff and thus increases the attractiveness of the profession. This will also allow schools to implement an effective personnel policy and for teachers to integrate sustainably into close-knit school teams, which will benefit the quality of education. For the school board and the school management, this measure means a reduction in the administrative burden, because there are far fewer staff movements (recruitment and termination) during the school year. This one-year period is possible because the proposal for the allocation of the staff budget to the school board includes the replacements in the envelope and is also in line with the introduction of the induction year.

Simplification of certificates of proficiency.

The Committee is in favour of simplifying the system of certificates of competence and giving more discretionary power to the school leaders. The regulations will only stipulate a minimum qualification level of teacher training. The school leader will check to what extent the candidate teacher has followed the correct subject-specific and didactic training for the position. If this is not the case, or not in full, a training programme can be agreed as part of the professionalisation plan in which the necessary volume of credits of professional and didactic competence can be acquired.

Specific master's programmes in primary education.

In primary education, the possibility is also opened up to recruit teachers who have followed a specific in-depth master's programme in addition to their educational bachelor's degree in implementation of the learning ladder. As provided for in our proposals on teacher remuneration, these teachers may receive a supplement.

Bachelor's and master's degrees throughout secondary education.

The Committee advocates that teachers with both a teacher training programme in educational bachelor's and a teacher training programme at master's level should be admitted to all grades and orientations of secondary education. It is up to the school leader to choose the right profile for the position in question and to assess the teacher's professional and didactic competences. Any shortages can be eliminated through the professionalisation plan through additional training.

Introduction of an induction year.

The Committee proposes to introduce a paid induction year, in which the starting teacher is intensively supervised. During this induction year, the starting teacher acquires the competencies that can only be developed in the workplace and in interaction with more experienced colleagues. The first year of employment in education will therefore be an induction year, a form of 'on-the-job training' of starting teachers in the first year of the career. By formalizing this, it becomes a structural part of teachers' professional development, a right for starting teachers and a formal job assignment for schools. It is essential that the joint responsibility of training institutions (teacher training institutes) and schools (with education providers and pedagogical guidance services) is central to this.

Introduction of a license to teach.

Following the example of many countries, we propose to investigate the introduction of a teacher's licence in Flanders as well. The induction year that ends with a licence then fulfils the function of a link between education and work.

Mentoring.

After the induction year, the mentoring for teachers at the beginning of their career continues. Focusing on professional and effective mentoring can ensure that we can keep starting teachers in the field. Effective mentoring with an eye for the development of the teacher on a personal, social and professional level is part of the solution to the teacher shortage.

Employment contract of indefinite duration from third year of employment.

After the induction year, the teacher will be appointed for one school year. From the third consecutive school year, the teacher is appointed to the school board for an indefinite period.

Abolition of the TADD priority scheme.

With the introduction of the induction year, the current TADD scheme will be abolished.

Maintaining stability of employment.

The Committee advocates maintaining the stability of employment for teaching staff. Education is a public sector, fulfils public functions and for the staff there is therefore a need for a legal status regulation that guarantees a permanent position.

A highly simplified legal status regulation.

The Committee argues in favour of a contemporary legal status system which, while maintaining the stability of the relationship, outlines a statutory framework that is as simple as possible, which makes it much easier for schools to organise high-quality education than at present.

Reversal of the policy decision to grant a permanent position after one year.

The measure that provides for the appointment after one year should be reversed. The reasoning for quickly offering job security to starting teachers is understandable, but the measure creates too many perverse effects on the field. The appointment comes too early in the process of professionalisation of starting teachers, especially when the induction year would be introduced. School leaders and boards have too little time and opportunities to see the starting teacher perform and make an informed decision.

Abolishing job reassignment.

The maximum percentage of tenured personnel per school board makes it possible to abolish the job reassignment scheme whereby redundant permanent staff members are placed in another school/with another school board. After all, the job assignment of the staff to the school board instead of to a school creates a wider employability than is currently the case.

Evaluation of new system of performance evaluation.

The new system of evaluation of teachers' performance must be evaluated within a number of years. As the proposals and recommendations in this report are implemented, the evaluation system will also have to be adapted accordingly.

Introduction of the 'teacher test' for every policy proposal.

The government, as well as education providers, should carefully examine the effect of each measure on the professional autonomy and the teacher's didactic competences. A kind of 'teacher test' should be considered for every policy proposal.

The experienced teacher

Better articulation of the professionalisation need by teachers.

Teachers need to raise their profile in the demand for professionalisation by articulating more strongly what they need. Professionalisation must be demand-driven and not supply-driven by the accidental interests of providers.

Personal professionalisation plan.

In consultation with the school management and within the framework of the professionalisation plan of the school and the school team, each teacher designs a personal professionalisation plan. As a rule, this plan involves a combination of formal training, independent informal learning and participation in non-formal education.

Linking professionalisation to seniority.

The implementation of the professionalisation plan is discussed during the performance interviews between the school management and the teacher. In the event of serious shortcomings, the school management will report this to the Ministry of Education and Training, which can then suspend the annual seniority increase in the salary scale.

Quality mark for in-service training initiatives and training for school leaders.

In-service training initiatives that meet certain characteristics are labelled to enable schools and teachers to identify high-quality and effective offerings. Every year, a register of certified refresher courses is published. This will also be the case for training for school leaders.

Introduction of the senior teacher.

We advocate an objective procedure to give teachers with a minimum seniority of 15 years the status of senior teacher. In that procedure, both the personal expertise and the HR perspective of the school must be taken into account.

The job assignment of teachers

A new definition of the teacher's job assignment.

From now on, we will express a teacher's job in 38 hours which a full-time staff member must work on a weekly basis to properly perform all tasks, just like in other sectors. However, that does not mean that teaching in the classroom will become lost in the total package of tasks. The core task of EVERY teacher is everything that is connected to the students and the classroom and teaching is and will remain the most important part therein. In principle, every teacher stands in front of the class.

School leaders and school boards

Core profile for school leaders.

We fully endorse the core profile for school leaders which will serve as a basis for the recruitment and professionalisation of school leaders in the future, provided that it is reviewed on a regular basis (e.g. every 5 years) and adapted to new needs and scientific insights.

No pedagogical certificate of competence for management posts.

The condition that a director must be in possession of a certificate of pedagogical competence should be removed. When recruiting a school leader, it is the task of the school board to make a thorough screening of the pedagogical and educational leadership of the candidate when it comes to positions that are directly related to the educational and pedagogical policy of the school. When composing the entire team of school leaders and the competencies that are present there, other themes such as financial and personnel policy can of course also be screened.

Strengthening school leadership in primary schools.

Specifically for primary education, where the staffing for policy and policy support is smaller than in secondary education, the resources for school management must be expanded in a structural and efficient manner.

A more adequate wage gap between teachers and school leaders.

In order to make the job of school leader attractive to teachers, it is also necessary that there is a certain wage gap between the salary of the teacher and that of the principal. The Committee welcomes the fact that the most recent CBA XIII has increased the wage gap between the salary of teacher and that of principal to 31% with the promise to go to 35%. That 35% gap seems to be the absolute minimum for the Committee.

Executive positions as mandates.

Management positions are no longer appointed permanently but become mandate positions. The term of a mandate is 6 years and can be extended, so that continuity in the school policy can be

maintained, if necessary or desirable. The mandate is linked to a mandate allowance, which is taken into account for the calculation of the pension.

Professionalisation of school leaders.

In view of the essential importance of the principal for a school, a generalised framework of professionalisation and competence development for school leaders is required, based on the core profile. School leaders also draw up an annual professionalisation plan that is discussed with the school board. Professionalisation includes both pre-service and in-service training courses to which training providers can subscribe. These programmes, like those aimed at the professionalisation of teachers, receive a quality mark. Customization is necessary, of which EVC is also a part. At certain points in their careers, it is recommended that school leaders voluntarily participate in an assessment that will allow them to gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses in leadership and human resources management.

Evaluation of school leaders.

School leaders also have the right to regular feedback on their performance and benefit from performance reviews and evaluations aimed at improving their professional performance. The school board plays an important role in this, but as for any manager, a system of bottom-up or 360° evaluation is also recommended.

Administrative scaling up.

The Committee is of the opinion that further work should be done in the short term towards a judicious increase in administrative scale.

Accreditation of school boards.

The Committee argues for the explicit recognition (and definition) of school boards in the educational regulations, including in subsidised education. Such recognition implies that school boards can be financed or subsidized by the government.

Creating the possibility to compensate directors.

In order to attract administrators with relevant experience and expertise, it is recommended that a school board can decide to pay the directors and/or the managing director a limited remuneration from the operating funds.

Abolition of the formal 'communities of schools'.

The Committee advocates the abolition of the formal communities of schools and the transfer of powers in the field of personnel policy from the schools' communities to the school boards.

Strategic personnel and welfare policy

Focusing on workable work.

It is very important to focus on workable work in schools, because the situation in that area has an immediate impact on sustainable employability: staff members with workable work remain healthy and motivated for longer. Workable work has a beneficial effect on staff retention.

Promoting HR-competencies among school leaders and boards.

School leaders and school boards need generic HR competencies and knowledge in order to be able to implement a strategic personnel and welfare policy. School boards should be able to create an overall HR and welfare framework. They are also expected to be able to support and coach school leaders in this area.

The remuneration of teachers and school leaders

Monitoring the competitiveness of wage developments.

The Committee does not advocate a general wage increase for teachers but recommends that the competitiveness of teachers' pay developments be better monitored by instructing the Ministry to publish a monitoring report every five years on teachers' remuneration compared to relevant categories in the labour market. The monitoring should compare, on the one hand, wages and pensions, but also the benefits enjoyed by workers in other sectors (company car, etc.) on the other. In this way, the competitiveness of education compared to other sectors can be monitored. This report can then be discussed by the social partners on the occasion of the collective bargaining.

An integrated renumeration system.

There will be a single salary scale for a qualified teacher, regardless of the level of education or the type of education in which the teacher is recruited. Supplements are added to this basic salary when the teacher meets certain conditions.

Introduction of a labour market allowance.

The Committee recommends that a labour market allowance be introduced in Flanders for teachers and other staff of schools that score high in GOK indicators. In this way, a financial incentive is introduced that motivates teachers to teach in these schools. In this way, the GOK policy is expanded from a policy that provides extra funding for schools to the remuneration policy of teachers. After local social consultation, the school board and school management can use application modalities adapted to the local situation.

In the future, we will evolve from degree to function remuneration.

The Committee takes the position that a radical switch to function remuneration in education is not opportune at this time and would have too many dysfunctional effects. But in the medium term, opportunities should be sought to evolve towards function remuneration.

Recognising seniority of career changers up to 20 years.

The Flemish Government has already made significant efforts to honour the seniority of career changers in education. The Committee proposes to take a final step in this direction by allowing new side entrants to transfer up to a maximum of 20 years of seniority from their previous work experience to a job in education.

Encourage full-time work.

The Committee recommends that the issue of part-time work in education be put on the agenda, that research into effective strategies be launched and that the appropriate approach be sought in consultation and dialogue with the social partners and the education sector, taking into account

those situations in which combining part-time work in education and part-time work in industry is an added value.

Cutting back on leave systems

Currently, there are no less than 22 different leave systems in education. This is a whole tangle of leaves with various conditions, durations and commencement dates. Needless to say, this is not very transparent, both for the school board as an employer and for the staff. A critical examination of the merits is therefore necessary with the aim of cutting back on the number of leave systems. This is best done in consultation with the social partners and representatives of teachers and school leaders.

Upon departure, the appointment remains valid for a maximum of 2 years.

The appointment as a teacher remains valid for a maximum of 2 years when the teacher leaves education to work in another sector. After 2 years, the teacher either returns to teaching or resigns.

Full-time appointment remains valid for a maximum of 5 years in the case of part-time work.

The second measure is that, when a full-time appointed teacher starts working part-time, the full-time appointment remains valid for a maximum of 5 years, provided that the part-time job assignment is at least 50%. If the part-time job assignment is less than 50%, the full-time appointment will automatically expire after 2 years. In both cases, the teacher retains the appointment only for the volume actually performed.

Financing and rationalisation

Maintaining open-end funding.

The Committee advocates that the *open-ended* funding for staff and operating funds as it exists today should be fully maintained.

Abandoning the utilization rate.

The Committee proposes that the new approach to staff management that it proposes should abolish the utilisation rate in secondary education and restore the numerator to 100%, on the understanding that the current 96.57% will be converted to 100%. This has already happened in primary education with the introduction of integrated supervision in 2012. It is best to completely remove the instrument of utilisation rates from the policy toolbox.

Envelope funding for schools.

The Committee is of the opinion that envelope funding for staff is the best way to achieve transparent funding that will enable schools and school boards to use staff resources as efficiently as possible according to local needs and contexts and thus to pursue a contemporary HR policy. In the envelope, all staff-related funding and subsidy flows to schools are decolorized and merged. This envelope is allocated to the school boards, which in turn distribute it among their schools. A condition for this is that the increase in scale of school boards can be continued.

Decolorization of funding streams.

The Committee is calling for a complete decolourisation of all products. This means that schools and school boards are given a great deal of autonomy in this area and are responsible for the use of these resources. It is therefore self-evident that the school boards are accountable to their stakeholders and to the government on a regular basis for the use of staff resources and the policy choices that are made. This autonomy should enable schools and school boards to pursue a personnel policy tailored to the needs of each school.

Reporting on the use of staff envelopes.

The school must report transparently on the spending of the staff envelopes so that the government and the taxpayer have insight into the allocation and spending of these public funds.

Introduction of points envelope for staff.

The school boards receive the staff envelope for their schools in the form of points. With these points, they can appoint staff members. The point weight of each member of staff depends on the position they perform, and the remuneration associated with it.

Maximum percentage of tenured personnel per school board.

Within the staff envelope, a maximum percentage of permanent staff members of 80% is determined at the level of the school board.

Social secretariat function at Ministry.

The Ministry of Education and Training will continue to take on the social secretariat function for staff in education and pay the salaries of the staff members, as is the case today. The so-called 'third party payer' system will therefore continue to exist.

Points envelope based on school and student characteristics.

The staff envelope for a school is built up on the basis of school characteristics and pupil characteristics and also includes the resources for the replacement of sick and absent staff members.

Less degressivity in school funding.

The Committee proposes to move towards a less degressive calculation formula. This will not only discourage undesirable effects such as school splits but can also be an incentive to grow towards a more rational study offer.

More efficient application of free choice.

A less degressive framework is not only an incentive to rationalise but can also lead to a more efficient and cheaper operationalisation of free choice. In this context, the Committee also advocates the abolition of the current minimum packages in secondary education.

Introduction of a free choice of staff resources.

In order to guarantee freedom of choice, as a substitute for the minimum packages, one could think of the allocation of a limited package of staff resources to guarantee free choice on a sufficiently large geographical scale, a so-called free choice package that is allocated to the central level of official education and distributed from there according to needs.

Integration of GOK in the points envelope.

The weighting of pupil characteristics will continue to be based on the GOK scheme as it is currently developed and integrated in primary education. For secondary education, this means that the exercise that was carried out in 2012 for primary education will also be carried out for secondary education and that both the SES characteristics with the respective weightings and the global range of resources for this purpose will be studied in order to determine the share of pupil characteristics in the envelope and their allocation.

Integrate funds for replacements into points envelope.

A percentage is provided in the staff envelope for the replacements of absent staff members. This percentage provided for the replacements is fixed and is calculated on the basis of the current volume of replacements at the Flemish level. This means that the deployment and cost of replacements and the organisation of replacements will become the integral responsibility of schools and school boards and that they will have to draw up an efficient and responsible policy for this.

A new mechanism for rationalisation and free choice.

In order to manage the rationalization of the courses on offer, it is necessary to ensure that a mechanism is in place that not only brings about rationalization, but also aims at an efficient distribution of the courses offered, which also guarantees and operationalizes the freedom of choice.

Denominational subjects on a larger geographical scale.

The current regulation for denominational subjects will be retained, but those that are followed by few pupils in an educational zone will be organised on a larger scale than the individual school. Depending on the context and the distances, this can be organised per city or per educational zone or by means of distance learning.

Indexation and growth path for operating funds.

It is desirable that after a few years of (partial) non-indexation, the operating funds are indexed and that a growth path for increase is foreseen.

Conditions for a qualitative teacher policy

Educational research programme.

The Committee recommends the development of a structural, long-term and high-quality educational research programme that can provide education policy in general and teacher policy in particular with much-needed evidence.

Better flow of research evidence to schools.

It is important to improve the flow of research evidence and scientific knowledge to schools, teachers and school leaders. Leerpunt plays a crucial role in this. However, the Committee does advocate that the broad professionalism of teachers, in which practical knowledge and craftsmanship are also very important, should be recognised and appreciated.

Evaluation research as part of the policy cycle.

The Committee advocates the systematic planning and implementation of independent evaluation studies of policy initiatives.

The specific needs of teachers in practically oriented subjects.

The Committee calls for special attention to be paid to the important role of teachers in practically oriented subjects: their recruitment, retention and career development. For this category of teachers, flexible employment contracts and forms of cooperation with companies are highly appropriate. Through combined careers and 'hybrid' roles, practical teachers can keep their competences permanently up to date, which benefits the quality and relevance of vocational education.

Stronger role for the inspectorate.

The Committee recommends that the composition and functioning of the Inspectorate be reviewed in the light of the proposals and recommendations of this report and the extension of its remit that goes with it.

Professional organisations of teachers and school leaders.

The Committee calls on the professional groups of teachers and school leaders to set up their own professional organisations that can provide a powerful breeding ground for the defence of the interests and further professionalisation of teachers and school leaders.

Better participation of teachers and school leaders in policy making.

The voice of teachers and school leaders must be heard more strongly in policy development, not only through trade unions in social dialogue or in advisory councils such as VLOR, but through appropriate professional organisation s. Feedback loops and information flow from the field to policy need to be better organised.

A new covenant on governance and autonomy.

It would be good if, after a fundamental discussion, the government and education providers could come to a kind of covenant on management and regulation, school autonomy and administrative responsibility. History, for example of the period after the School Pact of 1958, has shown that such an agreement can usher in a period of prosperity and prosperity in education.

Feedback of the proposals to the main lines

In 0 we have formulated the principles and guidelines on which this report is based. Now that we have listed all the Committee's proposals and recommendations, it is interesting to link them back to the guidelines from which we have started. In Table 6 we rank all proposals and recommendations under the seven main lines.

Table 6. Feedback from proposals and recommendations to the main lines

Guidelines	Proposals and recommendations
1. **Promoting contemporary personnel policy in schools**	• Recruitment of a teacher, as a rule, for one school year • More diversity in the teaching profession by lifting the ban on denominational symbols for teachers • Simplification of certificates of proficiency • Abolition of the TADD priority system • Employment contract of indefinite duration from third year of employment • Maintaining stability of employment • Reversal of the tenure after one year • Abolishing job reassignment • Evaluation of new system of performance evaluation • Promoting HR-competencies among school leaders and boards • Focusing on workable work • An integrated renumeration system • Recognising seniority of career changers up to 20 years • Cutting back on leave systems • Upon departure, the tenure remains valid for a maximum of 2 years • Full-time tenure remains valid for a maximum of 5 years in the case of part-time work
2. **Strengthen school autonomy, leadership and administrative capacity**	• Teachers appointed to school boards • Better wage multiplier between teachers and school leaders • Executive positions as mandates • No pedagogical proof of competence for management posts • Strengthening school leadership in primary schools • Professionalisation of school leaders • Evaluation of school leaders • Administrative scaling up • Accreditation of school boards • Creating the possibility to compensate directors • Abolition of the formal 'communities of schools' • Introduction of a labour market allowance • Envelope funding for schools • Decolorization of funding streams • Reporting on the use of staff envelopes • Introduction of points envelope for staff • Maximum percentage of tenured personnel per school board • Points envelope based on school and pupil characteristics • Less degressivity in financing • Integration of GOK in the points envelope • Integrate resources for replacements into envelope

Guidelines	Proposals and recommendations
	• A new covenant on governance and autonomy
3. **Valorising all the tasks of the teacher**	• A new definition of the teacher's job assignment
4. **Seeing the career as a continuum of professionalisation**	• Encouraging a positive study choice to become a teacher • Introduce a learning ladder in primary education • Focus on subject-specific and didactic training • Introduce an induction year • Mentoring • Introduction of the senior teacher • The specific needs of teachers in practically orientated subjects
5. **Treating professional development as a shared responsibility**	• Multidisciplinary teams in schools • Specific master's programmes in primary education • Bachelor's and master's degrees throughout secondary education • Professional organisations of teachers and school leaders • Better participation of teachers and school leaders in policy making
6. **Making career development competency-driven**	• Introduction of a license to teach • Better articulation of the professionalisation needs by teachers • Quality mark for in-service training initiatives • Linking professionalisation to seniority • Core profile for school leaders
7. **Making government policy more supportive and facilitating**	• Regular evaluation and update of professional profile and basic competencies • A highly simplified legal status regime • Introduction of the 'teacher test' for every policy proposal • Monitoring the competitiveness of wage developments • In the future, we will evolve from diploma to function remuneration • Encourage full-time employment • Maintaining open-end funding • Abandoning the utilization rate • Social secretariat function at ministry • More efficient application of free choice • A new mechanism for rationalisation and free choice • Introduction of a free choice of staff resources • Denominational subjects on a larger geographical scale • Indexation and growth path for operating funds • An educational research programme • Better flow of research evidence to schools • Evaluation research as part of the policy cycle • Stronger role for the inspectorate

Attachments

Appendix 1. List of members of the Committee

Chairman

Dirk Van Damme holds a PhD in Psychological and Educational Sciences from Ghent University. He became professor of educational sciences and chairman of the department of the same name at the same university in 1995. From 1992 onwards he also held positions in the cabinets of successive Flemish ministers of education, was general director of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) between 2000 and 2003, managing director of Community Education in 2004 and head of the cabinet of Flemish minister Frank Vandenbroucke between 2004 and 2008. From 2008 to 2021, he was Head of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation and Senior Counsellor at the Directorate for Education and Skills of the OECD in Paris (FR). Since 2021, he has been an independent consultant and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Curriculum Redesign in Boston (USA). He is a member of several international committees, including the Committee of the National Growth Fund in the Netherlands.

Vice-chair

Paul Yperman studied Germanic languages at the Catholic University of Leuven. In 1983 he started his teaching career as a teacher in various secondary schools that offer a variety of educational methods. He then became director of the Sint-Jozefscollege in Aalst and afterwards managing director of the umbrella organisation of the Flemish Jesuit colleges and for 6 years also of the umbrella organisation of the European Jesuit colleges. From 2009 to 2014 he was an advisor on compulsory education in the cabinet of Flemish Minister of Education Pascal Smet. Since 2021, he has been active as an independent consultant, mainly in education.

Secretary

Hilde Lesage, a linguist by training, is head of the Department of Educational Staff, Department of Education and Training. She has been working in the Department of Education and Training since 1990. At the start of her career, she was coordinator of workstations for secondary education and thus learned all aspects of the legal status regulations for teaching staff. She was appointed head of department in 1997 and has since been helping to shape policy on teaching staff as a manager with her team. Conducts all collective labour agreement negotiations. In the meantime, she has worked with seven education ministers. She is also a coach for managers within the Flemish civil service.

Members

Mohamed Al Farisi is an industrial engineer in Electronics-ICT and teaches in the GO! Spectrum School in Deurne. He holds a Master of Science in Applied Informatics, a Master of Science in Business Administration and a Certificate of Pedagogical Competence. He worked as a hardware and development engineer before making the switch to education. His expertise in the field of 'hard sector' is mainly situated in Automation and Electronics-Electricity. He has also been a member of the Committee for Better Education.

Lesley Arens worked in adult education, was responsible for the development of cross-network training courses as managing director of the Adult Education Consortium in Ghent and worked together with VDAB, SYNTRA, (local) governments and companies. In 2014 she became director at the helm of VOV learning network, the largest association for professionals in 'learning &

development'. In 2016 she joined HR-builders (now HR talents) where she built an HR freelance community of +3000 independent HR professionals. In 2019, she resolutely opted for entrepreneurship and founded #ZigZagHR with the ambition to inform, inspire, connect and professionalize HR professionals in Flanders.

Sarah Bauters is a dedicated education professional with a degree in Early Childhood Education (2010) and a BanaBa in Care Broadening (2010-2012). She started her career in Ghent as a care and classroom teacher until 2021, before making the switch to primary education, focusing on strong learning children. Sarah's passion for education and culture is reflected in her writings in drama, recitation, drama, eloquence and painting. In collaboration with external parties, she initiates educational projects at school that bring these domains together and has shared valuable insights as a member of the VLOR teachers' panel.

Kristien Bruggeman is founder and director of LAB Gedreven onderwijs, a secondary school where teachers and pupils can grow. She rethinks the traditional way of organising education to create time and space for collaboration and professionalisation for teachers and resolutely opts for shared leadership in her school. As a passionate transition coach, she guides and advises schools that want to embark on a change process. Her energy and passion for learning inspire others to seize the opportunities in innovative education.

Dag De Baere obtained his degree in evolutionary biology and taught science for five years at the GO! Koninklijk Atheneum Antwerpen. For the last three years, he combined his job as a teacher with that of innovation coordinator within the school, while also working as an employee of public partnerships at Teach for Belgium vzw. Between 2019 and 2022, he was part of the VLOR teachers' panel. Currently, he guides organisations and schools in the field of digitalisation and innovation. In doing so, he focuses on sustainable and targeted changes to improve the quality (or cost) of pedagogical projects. In the past year, he has already supported more than 50 schools in Flanders.

Hugo Deckers obtained a bachelor's degree in secondary education at Hasselt. Later, he also obtained a master's degree in moral philosophy at Ghent University. He worked for many years as a teacher in various athenea in Flanders. He then became trade union leader for the socialist union for public services (ACOD) in East Flanders and later secretary-general for ACOD education. In that role, he gained extensive experience in trade union work in education and in social negotiations in education**.**

Nicolas De Lobel obtained his bachelor's degree in secondary education at the Arteveldehogeschool in Ghent, for Dutch and project art subjects. He started as a teacher of Dutch, first in secondary education and later in education for newcomers speaking foreign languages. Meanwhile, he graduated from the University of Antwerp as a master in training and education sciences. Since 2018, he works as a tutor-coach at Teach for Belgium vzw where he guides and supports starting teachers so that they can make a difference and contribute to more social equality in our education system. Since the Erasmus+ project called 'NEST', he coaches and trains starting teachers and principals all over Flanders and supports (high) schools with training on classroom management techniques.

Kristof De Witte is full professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at KU Leuven. There, he is a founding member and director of the faculty research centre 'Leuven

Economics of Education Research' (LEER) which has an education economics focus. De Witte has over 100 international publications on topics such as early school leaving, efficiency measurement, influence of COVID-19 on learning outcomes, political economy and financial literacy. He also holds the chair 'Efficiency and Effectiveness of Educational Innovations' at United Nations University at Maastricht University as an associate professor. He was previously involved in the 'European Commission Expert Group on quality investment in education and training'. He received several scientific awards for his work, including the 'Laureate of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Sciences and Arts' and the 'Pioniersprijs' of KU Leuven.

Sofie Landuyt holds a master's degree in Public Administration and obtained a Teaching Certificate. She has worked as staff member for quality assurance and policy officer for education for the Flemish Colleges Council, general secretary of the Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen, adviser on higher education at the cabinet of minister Hilde Crevits, vice minister-president of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister of Education, and as chief of cabinet of alderman Mieke Van Hecke, alderman for Civil Affairs and Protocol in Ghent. Passionate about education, policy and people, Sofie has been director of Arteveldehogeschool's Education Expertise Network since the end of 2020. The Education Expertise Network brings together all programmes for and by teachers and focuses on education, research, services and lifelong learning. Since December 2022, she has also assumed the role of president of vzw SKOG, Scholengroep Katholiek Onderwijs Gent.

Myriam Neirynck after graduating as a bachelor of primary education at the Crombeeninstituut in Ghent, started the three-year DHOS course at the Catholic Higher Institute for Educational Studies in Ghent, combined with a full-time job assignment as class teacher of the 5th grade at GILKO Merelbeke. After 15 years in the field, the door opened there for 4 school years as substitute headmaster, followed by 13 years as headmaster of GBS De Vierklaver Asper/Baaigem/Gavere/Vurste. Since 3 school years, she returned to the village of her birth to take up the post as headmaster of the new school GBS De Vlinderboom Eke.

Evelien Timbermont obtained a PhD in law from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2020 with a thesis on the legal status of education personnel in the Flemish Community. Since 2021, she has been at the VUB with a teaching and research job assignment focusing, among others, on individual and collective labour law, labour relations in education, the impact of fundamental rights on the employment relationship, atypical employment relationships, identity-based employers, and equal treatment and non-discrimination. She is on the editorial board of the Journal of Social Law and the Journal of Educational Law & Policy**.**

Melissa Tuytens is a lecturer at the Department of Educational Sciences of Ghent University where she co-leads the research group Policy and Leadership in Education (BELLON). Together with her research group, she has built up a research tradition in school leadership, school policy, personnel policy and professionalisation in education, focusing on fundamental research and policy-supporting research with the aim of making these themes widely available among educational actors and supporting schools and policymakers to become better. In addition to her research work, she teaches within the pedagogical sciences programmes (bachelor and master) and the educational master's programme at UGent.

Greet Van Dender graduated with a Bachelor of Secondary Education in 1993 and spent 2 more years studying and working abroad (USA) at the distance learning centre at the University of Texas at Austin. She started in private in 1995 and moved into adult education as a computer science teacher in 2000. She was an educational advisor in 2011 and coordinator at the guidance service of provincial education Flanders in 2016 where she developed expertise in various topics including, dual learning, mentoring, the provincial leadership window and others. In 2019, she made the move to return to her home base and became principal at Richtpunt campus Hamme, a provincial school offering study programmes in the hard sector (wood, electrical and metal).

Caroline Van Driessche started with a Master's degree in Orthopedagogy. Her professional development led to the completion of an Executive Master in Public Management. Most recently, she took a course at Academica University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands) and is currently following the Exemplary Leaderschip Programme (UK) in the context of knowledge-rich curriculum and evidence-informed working in primary education. She started her professional trajectory as a scientific researcher, followed by a role as a remedial educationalist. After several years, she held a management position before assuming responsibility as General Director at Catholic Primary Education Oudenaarde in 2009. From 2023, she extended her leadership domain to the Free Learning Support Centres East Flanders, where she also holds the role of General Director.

Isabel Van Kerckhove graduated as a Master of Arts in linguistics at KUL after a Bachelor of Arts in Language and Literature, majoring in French-Dutch. Afterwards, she followed the Specific Teacher Training in Languages, choosing a diversity internship with pupils with autism spectrum disorder. She is a teacher and bridge teacher at De Radar hospital school. In this context, she teaches various subjects, guides pupils in their learning and teaching career processes and acts as an anchor figure for language policy and Appwel. From a passion for people, education and science, she was, among other things, part of the steering committee of the PXL research project 'ABC-proof evaluation' and was a member of the teachers' panel in the VLOR project 'The teacher'.

Ann Verreth studied political science at the Catholic University of Leuven. She worked for the HIVA - Research Institute for Work and Society and the study service of the Christian union (Algemeen Christelijk Werknemersverbond). She was secretary-general of the Flemish Colleges Council (2007-2009), deputy chief of cabinet and education advisor to Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters (2009-2014) and secretary-general of the Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (2014) and chief of cabinet of Flemish Minister of Education Hilde Crevits. From January 2016 to January 2019, she was also director and vice-president of the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). She was also vice-president of the European Consortium for Accreditation. In February 2019, she became general director of the KU Leuven Association and general director of the Odisee University of Applied Sciences in April 2021. Furthermore, following Harry Martens, she has chaired the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) since March 2018.

Mieke Vermeiren graduated in 1979 with a law degree from Ghent University. Her career was rich and varied: lawyer at the Bar of Antwerp, employee and head of department of a social-cultural centre, responsible for legal aid and assistance (patients' rights) and personnel director at a health insurance fund, counsellor and deputy chief of cabinet at Civil Service and Education Cabinets, manager at the Antwerp Port Authority and responsible for Flanders for the education-labour market relationship and for the career funds of the metal and technology sector. Retired since 1 February 2020, but still active as a project manager through her company VermeiMi bv. with the example of supervising the integration of dual learning in a school in Eeklo.

Appendix 2. Budgetary simulation

Simulations

Education is a sector in which the Flemish government invests heavily, both in absolute terms (14.7 billion euros in 2022) and in relative terms (over a quarter of all Flemish government spending). International comparisons show that our education system also receives relatively high resources per pupil compared to other education systems[337]. This is why the Committee considers it important to pursue budget neutrality with its proposals.

Some of the proposals launched in this report have a budgetary impact. For some proposals, the likely cost can be calculated fairly precisely. For other proposals, this is not the case, or it was impossible for the Committee to make a conclusive calculation in the time frame in which the report was produced. Nevertheless, the Committee wants to give a direction regarding the budgetary impact of the proposals. If an exact calculation of a measure is not possible, we either start from one possible implementation scenario or assumption or indicate the budgetary playing field in which to work. All figures we rely on come from administrative databases and were provided by the Department of Education.

The proposed measures that involve a cost and are relatively easy to estimate include the following:

- The teacher assistant in primary education (Chapter 5): the cost of appointing an average of 1 assistant teacher per primary school is €128 million.
- The setting up of micro credentials by colleges and universities to strengthen teachers' subject-matter and associated subject-didactic competences (Chapter 6): if 800 teachers use micro credentials for this purpose, the cost has been estimated at €1.8 million.
- The introduction of the induction year (Chapter 6): if teachers in the induction year are paid 100% and perform 30% fewer contact hours than average teachers and that difference is added to the schools' staff envelope, this measure is estimated at €73 million. The cost of professional supervision by schools and teacher training colleges for teachers in this induction year is estimated at €39 million. This represents a doubling of the current funds for induction.
- The extension of the staff for policy support in primary education (Chapter 6): if primary schools of 200 pupils and above receive an additional half-time member of staff and primary schools of 400 pupils and above receive an additional full-time member of staff, the cost is estimated at €97 million per year.
- Raising the seniority of new career changers to 20 years (Chapter 11) costs 3 million euros.
- Raising the pay gap between school leaders and teachers to 35% (Chapter 11) costs 9.3 million euros.

The total cost of the above measures is 351.1 million euros per year.

In addition, the report foresees a number of savings and rationalisations. For some of the proposals below, it will not be possible to save the full amount, but it gives an indication of in which areas and in what order of magnitude the savings are located:

- Today, the cost of minimum packages in secondary education (Chapter 12) is €17 million.

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[337] OECD (2023a).

- The estimate of the reduction of artificial splits of secondary schools located on the same campus (Chapter 12), a practice that generates a lot of administrative burden for schools and the education administration and is not very transparent for teachers and parents, generates €56 million. This estimate takes into account only the reduction in teacher hours and not the reduction in the number of director posts as a result of the reduction in the number of schools. In other words, the number of principals per campus remains the same in the simulation.
- The decrease in staff redundancy resulting from allocation at school board level, coupled with a maximum appointment rate of 80% at each school board level (Chapter 12), is estimated at €11 million.
- The organisation of religious subjects followed by a small number of students at the education zone level instead of the school level (Chapter 12) could generate 31 million.
- Chapter 12 calls for a less degressive staffing framework in secondary education. The first and by far the largest component is a fixed coefficient for teacher hours per pupil per structural component. This coefficient is therefore not degressive, but it differs per grade and per type of education and remains outside the scope of the story about degressivity. The second component is an additional coefficient per pupil per pupil group. This coefficient is degressive and is therefore in the scope of what the Committee is seeking to change. The total budget of this component is €262 million. That is a high amount, but still only 8.4% of the total number of teacher hours in secondary education today (including the hours for life philosophy teachers and excluding the hours for minimum packages). The Committee considers that it is within this item of €262 million that resources can be found to absorb the proposed measures with a budgetary impact, which does not mean that the entire amount can be called into question.

Consequently, the budgetary space within which potential savings are located based on the proposed measures is up to €378 million.

In addition, we also propose a measure that is neither a minus nor a plus in budgetary terms, but that reallocates resources. In particular, allocating the resources of the current school communities to the (scaled down) school boards (Chapter 9). The school boards can use the amount allocated to them for their own operation, including for the proposed limited remuneration for the members of the school board, as well as for the operational costs of their schools as is currently the case with school communities. Their budget is composed as follows.

- The budget for stimulus points for primary school communities today is €29.3 million.
- The budget of funds allocated to secondary school communities today is €63 million.

In addition, several measures have been proposed that aim at more efficient use of time for teachers, school leaders and school boards. These do not have a directly measurable effect, but will ensure less administrative burden (e.g. no administration for coloured funds; less complex legal status regulation), and more efficient time allocation (e.g. no more constant job interviews in case of illness; support by teacher assistants in primary education) so that more time is available for core tasks.

Conclusion

As also indicated at the beginning of this report, the Committee does not aim to increase the education budget with the measures it proposes. Therefore, the Committee has also looked for ways to make savings in the education budget without compromising the quality of education. Calculating all this in a balanced way is not realistic at this point in the thought process, but

providing a direction is. The approximate total cost of the proposals is €351.1 million. Potential savings can be found in measures representing a total budget of up to €378 million. However, this does not imply that effectively that full amount can be saved. Besides the directly measurable budgetary impact, the Committee also believes that the proposals contain many efficiency gains for schools and school boards. These are, of course, not quantifiable.

We do not have the intention to downplay the figures mentioned above, but it is still good to put them in the perspective of the education budget:

- The cost of the new policy measures for primary and secondary education (including special education) during the current legislature is 373 million euros. This calculation includes only the recurrent investments, and they are not cumulative.
- In 2021, the education budget for compulsory education was €8.75 billion[338].
- The budget for salaries in compulsory education (i.e. primary, secondary, and special primary and secondary education) was €8.1 billion in 2021. The budget for the year 2024 registers 8.3 billion euros for this purpose.
- The average cost per pupil in 2021 was €6,038 in primary education and €9,335 in secondary education[339].

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[338] https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/statistisch-jaarboek-van-het-vlaams-onderwijs-2021-2022
[339] *Ibid.*