



NATIONAL OVERVIEW

NEW MEDIA AND ICT IN ULL

Country: Belgium (Flanders)

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University Lifelong Learning in the national context¹

Lifelong Learning

Belgium is a federal state with three main levels of government: the federal state, the communities and the regions. Competences for education in Belgium lie mainly with the communities. In this national report we will focus on education in Flanders, which encompasses both the Flemish region and the Flemish community. Flanders recognizes the importance of lifelong learning. Since the 1990's lifelong learning has a prominent place on national and international policy agendas. Following the 2000 Memorandum on Lifelong Learning – the response from the European Commission to the Lisbon strategy formulated by the European Council - , the Flemish government approved an action plan on lifelong learning ('Een leven lang leren in goede banen') on 7 July 2000. This plan was the first step towards a framework that integrated and coordinated a range of different initiatives developed by different ministries. Since 2005 a structural basis has been developed for an integrated policy on education, training and employment, geared towards stimulating lifelong and lifewide learning and towards tightening the link between education, training and non-formal education, on the one hand, and the labour market, on the other hand.

Both in the most recent and previous Government Strategies (2004-2009 and 2009-2014) and in the policy notes of relevant ministers responsible for Education and Training, Work and Culture, there are multiple references to engagements with regard to lifelong and lifewide learning.

In Flanders, several lifelong learning training programmes come under the common denominator continuing education. It comprises both formal and non-formal education and offer courses at very different levels. Other than universities and/or university colleges, the programmes are offered by a variety of organisations:

- Second chance schools offer an alternative way to get a secondary school degree.
- Social-cultural organisations organise continuing education mainly in nonprofessional / general interest topics.
- Adult education centres provide a range of basic and general vocational and non-vocational education programs.

¹ Report KU Leuven in the framework of the QACEP project (not published).



- Flemish public employment institution (VDAB) organises vocational training
- Unions and employer organisations organise training mainly on human resources management and legislation.
- Professional bodies and the sectoral training organisations organise vocational training.
- Government also organises information sessions about new legislation. These initiatives are rather exceptional.
- Finally there are a lot of private initiatives that organise mainly vocational training, basic as well as advanced.

University Lifelong Learning

When it comes to **university lifelong learning** we apply the definition developed by EUCEN in the framework of the BeFlex project:

“ULLL is the provision by higher education institutions of learning opportunities, services and research for: the personal and professional development of a wide range of individuals - lifelong and life wide; and the social, cultural and economic development of communities and the region. ULLL is at university level and research-based; it focuses primarily on the needs of the learners; and it is often developed and/or provided in collaboration with stakeholders and external actors”.

In Flanders universities and university colleges (hogescholen) offer tertiary education. After signing the Bologna declaration, higher education institutions adapted their programmes to the Bachelor - Master structure. As part of the reform, the Flemish universities and university colleges organised themselves in five associations. An association is an inter-institutional co-operation between one university and one or more colleges of higher education. There are five associations in Flanders:

- KU Leuven Association: <http://www.associatie.kuleuven.be>
- Antwerp University Association: <http://www.associatie-antwerpen.be>
- Brussels University Association: <http://www.universitaireassociatiebrussel.be>
- Ghent University Association: <http://www.augent.be>
- Limburg University Association: <http://www.auhl.be>

The Decree of 4/04/2003 on the restructuring of the Higher Education in Flanders (known as the Higher Education Act) allows Higher education Institutions to organise continuing education and determines that postgraduate programmes need to have at least 20 credits. The Decree was a major



step forward in adjusting the higher education offer to non-traditional student's publics. The establishment of a credit accumulation system is expected to create more flexibility for learners, especially those combining their studies with professional and/or family duties. The Flemish Government offers financial incentives to higher education institutions adapting their programmes to the needs of adult learners.

In general, continuing education provided by universities and university colleges in Flanders can be divided in the following types:

- Advanced Bachelor programmes
- Postgraduate programmes
- Certified continuing education programmes
- Continuing education with proof of attendance

Other possibilities of university lifelong learning are:

- Participation in individual courses from the Ba and Ma programmes (Flexibility Decree)
- Bachelor programmes in evening classes
- Study Centres 'Open Universiteit'
- University of the Third Age
- Lecture series, seminars and workshops open for all

The use of ICT and new media in ULLL

Higher education institutions decide autonomously whether and to what extent they integrate the use of new media and/or ICT in their study programmes. In general all higher education institutions are making use of ICT in their education and thus also in ULLL. The use of educational technology is mostly supported by a central supporting unit or decentralised by supporting staff in the faculties.

At KU Leuven, the Media and Learning Unit, fulfills the role of educational support service. The Media and Learning Unit supports in an integrated and interdisciplinary way education at the university, with focus on media, technological, pedagogical and organisational aspects. Lecturers are offered advice on and support with the effective use of digital, interactive and audio-visual media in higher education. The Media and Learning unit acts as an interface at the university for networked e-learning in an international context.

The continuing education centre of the university is part of the Media and Learning Unit. The centre offers support for different postgraduate and continuing education programmes. The team is



responsible for: support with regard to the procedures to be followed, minimal requirements of contracts, timing, and steps to be taken; the general promotion of continuing education offer of the university; giving advice and supporting the development of new ideas and programmes. As they are an integral part of the Media and Learning Unit, special attention is given to the integration of ICT in their programmes. The student population is a very heterogeneous group and is often people who combine a study programme with work and/or a family, therefore the use of educational technology very much offers new possibilities and strengthens the quality of the education. Finally, the study centre of Open Universiteit is located at the Media and Learning Unit. Open Universiteit offers distance higher education programmes. They are thereby making optimal use of new educational technologies to deliver the content and organising individual study in a flexible way.

Research of new media in ULLL

In Flanders, academic research about the use of new media and/or ICT in education is mainly done at the faculties and/or research institutes affiliated with the university or university colleges. For KU Leuven, the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, more specifically the Centre for Instructional Psychology and Technology conducts research in the design and use in educational settings of ICT supported learning environments. Secondly, the Centre for Research on Professional Learning & Development, Corporate Training and Lifelong Learning investigates learning in organisations, in training programs, lifelong learning and organisational learning.

Similar research groups can be found at the University of Gent, Department of Educational Studies, at the University of Antwerp, the Institute of Education and Information Sciences and at the Hogeschool – Universiteit Brussel, Educational Research & Development group.

Practices of new media in ULLL

If we analyse the way ICT and new media are used in ULLL, we find that the general trend is blended learning. Blended learning refers to all methods of learning which are supported by a combination of face-to-face and online learning activities. Because of the flexibility, blended learning is a good way to meet the needs of lifelong learners, who often combine their study with work or family life. Current technologies that are being used are: videoconferencing, web conferencing, live streaming, web lectures, screencasts and interactive multimedia.



Current means of DIALOGUE

There are several channels at different levels of cooperation where researchers and practitioners of new media in education and ULLL can build a dialogue.

At national level

- The **Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR)** is an autonomous advisory body which improves mutual understanding and cooperation amongst universities in Flanders. VLIR operates as a think tank and advises the Flemish government on all policy aspects higher education is involved in. VLIR has different working groups that allow members to discuss specific topics of interest. One of the working groups is dealing with education policy. Within this group a subgroup focusing on the topic of blended learning was established. The members of the working group are representatives of all the universities specialised in the field, VLIR, VLHORA and the Ministry of Education. They produced a vision document in which they encourage blended learning as a way to involve students that combine study and work.
- The **Centre for Blended Learning (CBL)** is a centre of expertise in blended learning, initiated by the KULAK, the undergraduate campus of KU Leuven, in cooperation with 3 university colleges (Katho, KHBO and Howest) in the region West-Flanders. The centre was funded in the framework of the European Regional Development Fund. The centre advises Flemish companies, SME's, training centres and adult educational institutions in the conception and the development of blended learning environments. The educational advice is tailored to the specific learning needs and context of the external institution. The advice is scientifically based and gives answers to questions about education/training. The CBL is the channel through which dialogue between research and practice is established.

At institutional level

- The network of expertise **School of Education Association KU Leuven** is a collaboration of 22 teacher training programmes from 12 university colleges, 9 adult education centres and KU Leuven. The network runs several projects which are organised around different subjects



including ICT and Multimedia. The main aim of the network is to optimize the teacher training programmes and do they contribute to the professionalisation of future teachers.

Collaboration was set up between the Media and Learning Unit and different faculties for relevant topics of master theses. Within the Science, Engineering and Technology Group of KU Leuven, at the department of electrical engineering an agreement has been made for master theses about speech recognition. At the department of computer science, similar proposals are done in the field of human-computer interaction. The aim is to get input from researchers for the multimedia systems that are developed at Media and Learning Unit. At the Faculty of Educational Sciences there is a strong collaboration with the researchers from the centre of Instructional Psychology and Technology. Examples of thesis topics in the field of educational technology are: “The educational surplus value of the use of web lectures in higher education” and “The impact of design of psysical learning environments”. (cfr. Case study 2)

- Other dialogue occasions for researchers and practitioners are generated by organising (ad hoc) seminars, events and conferences. One example is **Day of Educational Research on Higher Education**, at KU Leuven. This is a half day seminar where research and teaching staff from the faculties and central educational support units can network. The seminar has been organised two years in a row now and is expected to take place once a year. (cfr. Case study 1)



Relevant sources

Websites

<http://ppw.kuleuven.be/english/etrg/CIPT/ciptindex>

<http://ppw.kuleuven.be/english/etrg/poolleng/poollenghome>

http://www.onderwijskunde.ugent.be/nl/onderzoek_aanpakken.htm

<http://www.ua.ac.be/main.aspx?c=.ONDERZKDBE&n=40312&id=UA056>

http://www.hubrussel.net/ERD_site/ERD_HOMEPAGE

<http://www.vlir.be/content1.aspx?PageId=315>

<http://www.kuleuven-kulak.be/BlendedLearning/>

<http://schoolofeducation.eu/>