

Promoting the recognition of non formal education in Flanders

Existing continuing education and lifelong learning practices within the educational system in Flanders

1. Adult Education in Flanders

Adult education aims to teach the knowledge, skills and attitudes course participants need to: function in society, participate in further education, exercise a profession, master a language and enables the course participant to obtain a recognised course certificate, certificate or diploma.

Social advancement education or “evening classes” is probably the best known form of adult education. It is organised both at the level of secondary education and at the level of one-cycle higher education. It enables the participant to obtain a recognised certificate. The scope of this type of education is varied and broad. Moreover, in a number of institutions the course participant can also pursue the “General Education” area of study. In this way, the course participant can still obtain the full diploma of secondary education.

Adult basic education focuses on low-skilled adults and is provided by means of a very different teaching method tailored to suit the needs of the target group.

Supervised Individual Study (B.I.S.) offers correspondence courses through distance learning for prisoners and candidates preparing for the Examination board.

Part-time education in the arts (DKO) provides easily accessible arts education to young people and adults. Participants gain artistic insight, learn basic techniques and acquire theoretical knowledge that can be applied in practice. For adults, education in the arts can be an interesting pass time or a first step towards becoming an amateur or professional arts practitioner.

2. Life Long Learning in Flanders

On 31 March 2003, the Training and Alignment Information Service (DIVA) was launched. DIVA co-ordinates the educational provision for adults in Flanders. DIVA facilitates the co-operation between the policy fields Education and Training, Employment, Culture and Economy. DIVA’s partners are the educational networks, VDAB, VIZO and Socius, which represent adult education (including further higher education, OSP, basic education, BIS and DKO), the training courses set up by VDAB, by Syntra and socio-cultural adult work.

Through an awareness-raising programme with the slogan ‘Become what you want to be’, DIVA tries to create a positive learning environment and enhance the participation of the adult citizen in education and training. The Learning Shop project intends to guide the citizen through the educational provision and training pathways by means of an on-line database. This website will also inform the citizen about work experience places through the work experience data base.

The non-formal education in KLJ

KLJ organize the following different courses:

- Basic course for youth leaders (how to organize activities for children and youngsters, how to participate actively in a local branch, how to deal with children and youngsters, etc.)
- Course for youth leaders who run a local branch
- Course for trainers who want to give the courses to the youth leaders (how to give a presentation, how to explain different themes, how to teach in a interactive way, etc.)
- Other courses for youth leaders about themes that are interested for them to run their local branch in the best way

KLJ is also recognized, by the Flemish government, as an educational organization for youth. Because of that recognition, we can give to the youngsters that follow the basic course, the course for youngsters who lead the local branch and the course for the trainers, an official certificate. That certificate is important in the social and in the youth sectors, but has a very low importance in the professional world and in the formal education.

In Flanders, and also in a lot of other countries in Europe, we think that one of the most important challenges for education policy makers is to find ways to increase the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal education among young people. Non-formal and informal education is essential for the personal development and life-long learning of individuals. Youth organizations which are one of the most important providers of informal and non-formal education, want that the labour market and the formal school system takes their way of learning serious.

Recognition of Competences acquired in youth movements

In Flanders, there is a starting project within the Flemish youth movements which aims at promoting the “Recognition of Competences” (including all competences, not only the competence you achieved in the formal educational system).

Why is that so important?

In a world where life long learning is more important than ever, and where people all the time have to learn new things, it is very important that also that sort of learning is recognized. Informal and non-formal learning is an essential part of life-long learning. There are also a lot of youngsters who did not finish school, but who did achieve a lot of experience as a volunteer in an organization. For them it would be a huge step forward when their competences that they achieved in a non-formal experience.

But there are also some threats and concerns:

- Provide and approve some quality with quality assurance methods: where is their freedom, flexible system?
- To become more formal or very similar at the formal educational system
- The outcomes has to be measurable, the youngsters who follow the courses have to assess the outcomes
- Mattheüs effect: young people with the best information will benefit the most

The first and very important step is to make young people aware of the fact that they are acquiring a wide range of skills through their participation in youth activities. We, as KLJ, don't want to become like the formal school system, we don't want to assess our youth leaders by forcing them to do an exam. We want that they realize the importance of the skills they learn in non-formal and informal learning. We also want that the labor market and the formal school system recognizes non-formal and informal learning as very important and with the same quality as formal learning, but we don't want to transform our way of teaching in a formal way with exams.

In Flanders some youth organizations and social-cultural organizations work together to develop a portfolio for these people who achieve a lot of skills in non-formal and informal education. Such a portfolio should help people to: 1/assess and record their competences, 2/describe their competences to others, 3/set their own learning and development goals.