

Chapter 4

The teaching workforce in the Flemish Community of Belgium

This chapter gives an overview of the main characteristics of the teaching workforce in the Flemish Community of Belgium, including: initial teacher education, recruitment into teaching, employment status and career structure, compensation, workload and use of teachers' time, teacher evaluation and teacher professional development. It also considers the role of school leaders and other types of staff in managing and supporting the teaching workforce at the school level. The chapter reviews existing policies aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the teacher labour market and providing adequate employment conditions for teachers to perform well. It also examines challenges faced by the school system in attracting, preparing, distributing and retaining effective teachers, as well as a number of fairness concerns in the organisation of the teaching profession.

Context and features

Profile of the teaching workforce

Size of the teaching workforce and its main characteristics

In 2012, 119 285 teachers worked in Flemish publicly-funded schools, with the following distribution across education levels: 15.8% in pre-primary education, 31.0% in primary education and 53.2% in secondary education (see Table 4.1). About 89% of these teachers worked in mainstream education while about 11% of teachers worked in special education (see Table 4.1). In 2014, the total number of school staff (management, teaching and support staff) was 131 523, reflecting a 2.4% increase from staff levels in 2008 (Table 4.2). Growth in staff levels between 2008 and 2014 was more significant in special secondary education (21.0%) and mainstream elementary school (8.4%) while mainstream secondary education observed the most significant decrease (4.1%).

As in other OECD countries, the teaching profession in the Flemish Community of Belgium is highly feminised: the proportion of women in 2012 reached 97.5% in pre-primary education (close to the OECD average of 97%), 81.8% in primary education (OECD average of 82%) and 62.3% in secondary education (OECD averages of 67% in lower secondary education, 59% in general upper secondary education and 53% in vocational upper secondary education) (Table 4.1 and OECD, 2014a).

Table 4.1. **Number, gender and age of teachers, by level and type of education, 2012**

	Number of teachers	Proportion of females (%)	Proportion of teachers aged less than 30 (%)	Proportion of teachers aged 50 and over (%)
Mainstream pre-primary education	18 279	97.5	23.7	14.2
Special pre-primary education	578	97.6	23.2	14.9
Total pre-primary education	18 857	97.5	23.7	14.2
Mainstream primary education	31 062	81.7	20.5	23.8
Special primary education	5 966	82.5	24.0	19.0
Total primary education	37 028	81.8	21.1	23.0
Mainstream secondary education	56 944	62.0	16.4	30.1
Special secondary education	6 456	65.3	21.0	26.2
Total secondary education	63 400	62.3	16.9	29.7
Total	119 285	73.9	19.3	25.2

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, Brussels, www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm.

The teaching profession in the Flemish Community is considerably young when compared to the OECD average. In 2012, the proportion of teachers aged less than 30 was 23.7% in pre-primary education, 21.1% in primary education and 16.9% in secondary education (Table 4.1), against OECD averages of 13% in primary education and 10% in secondary education (OECD, 2014a). The proportion of teachers aged 50 and over was 14.2%

in pre-primary, 23.0% in primary and 29.7% in secondary education (Table 4.1), against OECD averages of 30% and 36% for primary and secondary education respectively (OECD, 2014a).

In 2014, most school staff worked in publicly-subsidised private education (VGO) (64.7%), while 19.3% worked in Community Education (GO!) and 16.0% in municipal and provincial schools (OGO). These proportions were practically unchanged relative to their 2008 levels: 65.3%, 19.3% and 15.4% respectively (Annex 4.A1).

Initial preparation and qualifications of teachers

Teaching in Flemish schools requires the following minimum qualifications (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Teachers at the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education level, as well as teachers of certain programmes in upper secondary education, are required to have a bachelor's degree in teacher education for the relevant level. Teachers in general upper secondary education need to complete a master's degree (in a given discipline) and a specific teacher education certificate. For teachers of practical subjects in technical and vocational education, a combination of a general qualification (secondary degree, bachelor's degree) with a specific teacher education certificate is also possible.

Initial teacher education is offered in two main forms: professional 3-year Bachelor of Education degree programmes, which integrate subject-specific and pedagogical components (referred to as integrated teacher education programmes) and programmes attended in addition to or after a subject-specific initial programme at bachelor's or master's level (referred to as specific teacher education). For more information on the organisation of initial teacher education in the Flemish Community, see Annex 4.A2. Preparation for special education teachers is undertaken as a specialisation, in the form of an Advanced Bachelor's programme (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

The teacher education programmes offered by different institutions are equivalent and based on the same basic teacher career profile. The latter sets out the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of an experienced teacher. From these a set of minimum competencies have been developed to frame initial teacher education programmes (McKenzie et al., 2004). Access to teacher education programmes follows general rules to access higher education (universities and university colleges), i.e. it is based on successful graduation from secondary education. Institutions of teacher education do not organise specific entrance examinations. However, in the Governmental agreement for 2014-19, the introduction of non-binding examinations to enter initial teacher education is envisaged (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

By international comparison, Flemish teachers have lower than average educational attainment, which is mostly the result of the minimum qualifications required to teach (see below). According to data from the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), in 2013, 12.0% of Flemish lower secondary teachers and 6.0% of primary teachers had a university (master's) degree (ISCED 5A) or higher, by far the lowest figures among the TALIS participating countries (against TALIS averages of 90.9% and 79.6%, respectively). Also, 98.3% of Flemish lower secondary teachers had completed a teacher education bachelor's programme, the 3th highest figure among the 34 TALIS participation countries (against a TALIS average of 89.8%) (OECD, 2014b).

Recruitment into teaching

The main requirement to apply for a job as a teacher is to hold a teaching degree for the relevant level of education and field of study. Teachers are hired into schools through an open recruitment procedure organised at the school board level and with considerable involvement of the school principal. Schools boards have autonomy in teacher recruitment, selection and appointment, and therefore act as the employers. However, schools need to observe regulations at the Flemish Community level regarding teacher required standard qualifications and the statutory rights of teaching staff. In particular, they need to give priority to those teachers who have a permanent nomination and take into account their seniority. Teachers apply directly to schools and/or school boards and the hiring procedure typically involves interviews by the school board (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

In specific circumstances, it is possible to teach in a Flemish school without the required qualifications. This can occur with “acceptable” qualifications, if the individual has a teaching degree for the relevant level of education but in a different field of study, or with “other” qualifications, when the individual has a degree other than a teaching degree and/or some relevant professional experience. While schools should always give priority to individuals with “required” or “acceptable” qualifications, they may exceptionally (e.g. in a situation of teacher shortage) appoint an individual with “other” qualifications (Eurydice, 2015).

Employment status and career structure

Teachers with a permanent contract have a quasi-public servant status. While teachers are employed by the school boards, they are paid by the Flemish Government and their employment conditions, including pensions, are defined within the public service framework (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). There are three stages in the contractual status of teachers: i) temporary appointment of definite duration, ii) temporary appointment of continuous duration (i.e. automatically renewed if the respective school is funded the associated teaching hours), and iii) permanent employment. For more information regarding teachers’ employment status, see Annex 4.A2.

The characteristics of the Flemish teaching workforce in relation to their contractual status are quite similar to the TALIS average. According to 2013 TALIS data, in the Flemish Community, 83.2% of lower secondary teachers were permanently employed (the TALIS average was 82.5%) while 4.2% of teachers had a fixed-term contract for more than one school year and 12.6% had a fixed-term contract for one school year or less, respectively (the TALIS averages were 5.8% and 11.9% respectively).

A permanent position provides the teacher with substantial job security. A teacher with permanency status continues to be employed even if his or her job becomes redundant due to falling student numbers. In theory, a teacher with permanent status can be dismissed, for example as a result of a disciplinary measure or if they have received two consecutive “insufficient” evaluations. In practice, however, dismissing a permanent teacher can prove difficult and rarely occurs.

In the Flemish Community, teachers have few opportunities for promotion. The teaching career does not provide for distinct stages associated with competency levels or given roles and responsibilities in schools. Promotion essentially involves access to

(Eurydice, 2015): i) "Selection offices" such as deputy-principal, technical advisor and co-ordinator, in secondary education; or ii) Management functions as school principal. Management positions in school groups, school associations and school boards may also be considered a promotion.

However, job differentiation is typically offered at the school level. Roles and responsibilities outside teaching, such as co-ordinating departments or organising cultural activities are distributed by school management as part of the autonomy of schools. Teachers can be exempted from teaching in order to fulfil other tasks in support of the needs of schools, which are typically part of "special pedagogical tasks". A specific example of such specialised tasks is the role of mentor of beginning teachers. This role involves training and a time allowance (i.e. fewer hours of teaching).

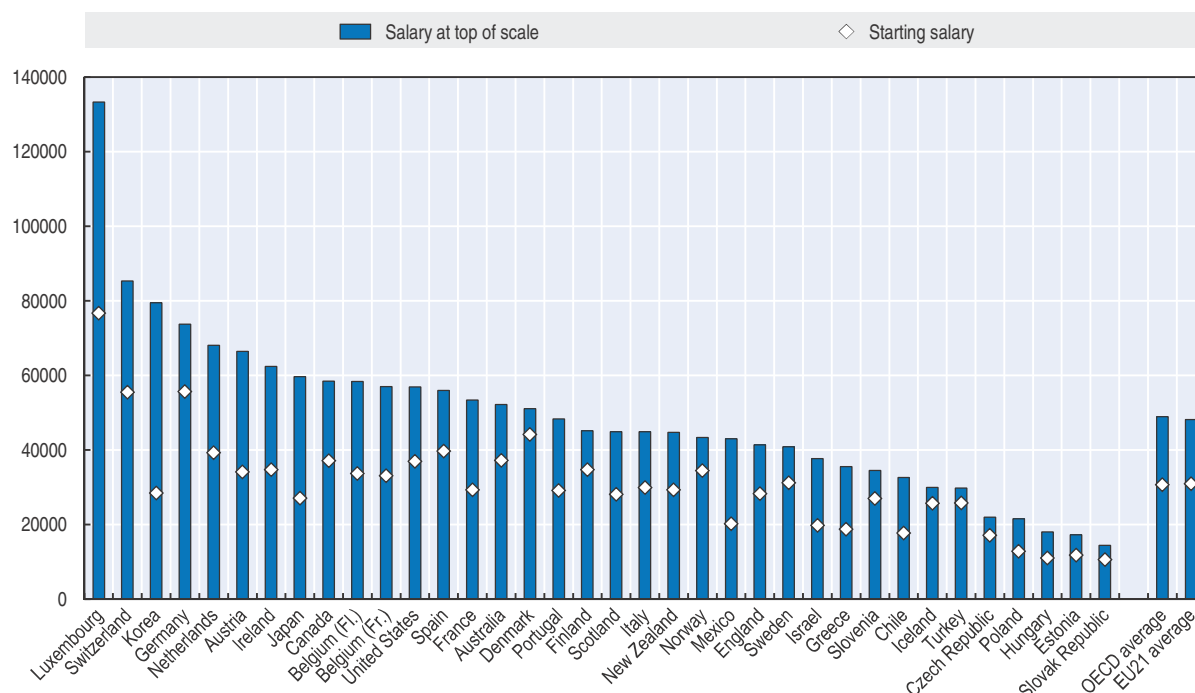
Compensation

Teachers have common salary scales irrespective of the network of schools they belong to as these are determined by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training following a process of collective bargaining with teacher unions. However, salary scales differ according to the level and type of education. Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary teachers have a common salary scale but a different salary scale exists for upper secondary education (the rationale for this differentiation relates to the level of initial qualifications required, i.e. bachelor's or master's degree). In addition, a great number of salary scales coexist for upper technical and vocational secondary education. Teachers in management functions have separate salary scales.

Typically, qualified teachers reach the maximum of the salary scale after 27 years of experience in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (OECD, 2014a). This is longer than the average length of teacher salary scales in OECD countries (24 for lower secondary education, see OECD, 2014a). The maximum salary of a pre-primary, primary or lower secondary teacher is approximately 73% greater than the beginning salary, whereas for upper secondary teachers the maximum salary is about 76% greater. The salary scales for Flemish teachers look slightly "steeper" than the OECD average (OECD, 2014a). Compared to most OECD countries, the Flemish Community puts a heavy emphasis on length of teaching experience in determining individual teachers' salaries. Teachers with the same levels of qualifications and teaching experience receive essentially the same salary. Teachers are paid according to the number of their teaching hours, which they are not in a position to choose (Eurydice, 2015).

Teacher statutory salaries in the Flemish Community are above the OECD average for all levels of education at the different stages of a career (OECD, 2014a). Figure 4.1 displays lower secondary teacher annual salaries at the start of career and at top of the scale, showing the Flemish Community above the OECD average. When teachers' salaries are compared to earnings for tertiary-educated workers aged 25-64, while showing that salaries in the Flemish school system are lower than in other sectors (except for upper secondary education), the situation of Flemish teachers is more favourable than the OECD average for pre-primary education (ratio of 0.88 against an OECD average of 0.80), primary education (ratio of 0.89 against an OECD average of 0.85) and upper secondary education (ratio of 1.13 against an OECD average of 0.92) while in lower secondary education the situation is similar to the OECD average (ratio of 0.87 against an OECD average of 0.88) (OECD, 2014a and Figure 4.2). Salaries of teachers in the Flemish Community have been relatively stable over the last few years. Salaries increased, in real terms, by 1%, 1% and 2%

Figure 4.1. **Teacher annual salaries at start of career and at top of the scale, lower secondary education, public institutions, 2012**



Notes: Salaries are in equivalent USD converted using purchasing power parities (PPPs) for private consumption. Data refer to statutory salaries for teachers with minimum qualifications. For Hungary, Sweden and the United States, data refer to actual salaries. For Sweden, reference year is 2011.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>.

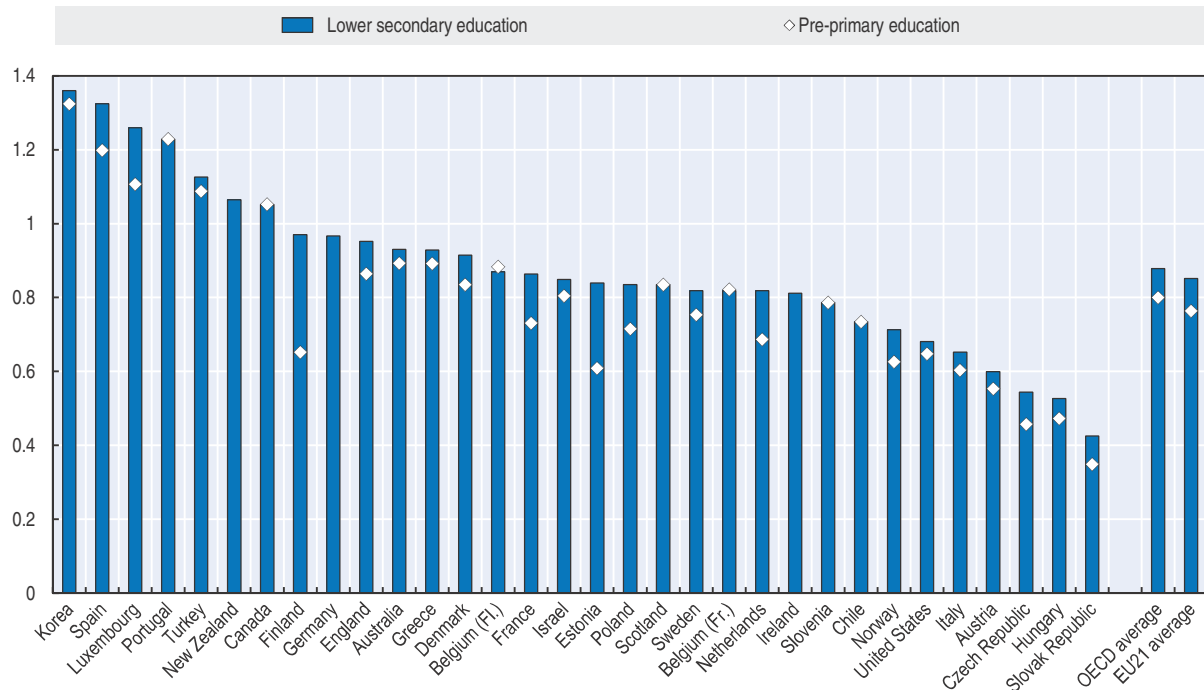
in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary respectively, between 2005 and 2012, for teachers with 15 years of experience and minimum training (Figure 4.3). These increases stood around the OECD averages (3%, 2% and 1% in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary respectively) (OECD, 2014a).

There are no extra allowances for difficult working conditions, specific subjects or responsibilities, teaching in areas of shortage, or for good performance. Only the completion of additional professional development leading to specific qualifications can have a positive impact on salaries. Some salary allowances are provided such as a child allowance and for pre- and after-school child care and lunchtime supervision. Experience outside education is generally not taken into account with the exception of vocational and technical teachers who can have some work experience recognised on the salary scale (Eurydice, 2015).

Workload and use of teachers' time

In the Flemish Community, teachers are employed mostly under a weekly teaching load system whereby their basic compensation is mostly associated with their teaching load. Regulations stipulate the minimum and maximum teaching loads for teachers (see Table 4.2). The total number of working hours and the range of tasks are expected to perform beyond teaching itself are not defined by legislation. The latter are defined on an individual basis in function of the specific needs of the school.

Figure 4.2. **Teachers' salaries relative to earnings for tertiary-educated workers aged 25-64, public institutions, pre-primary and lower secondary education, 2012**

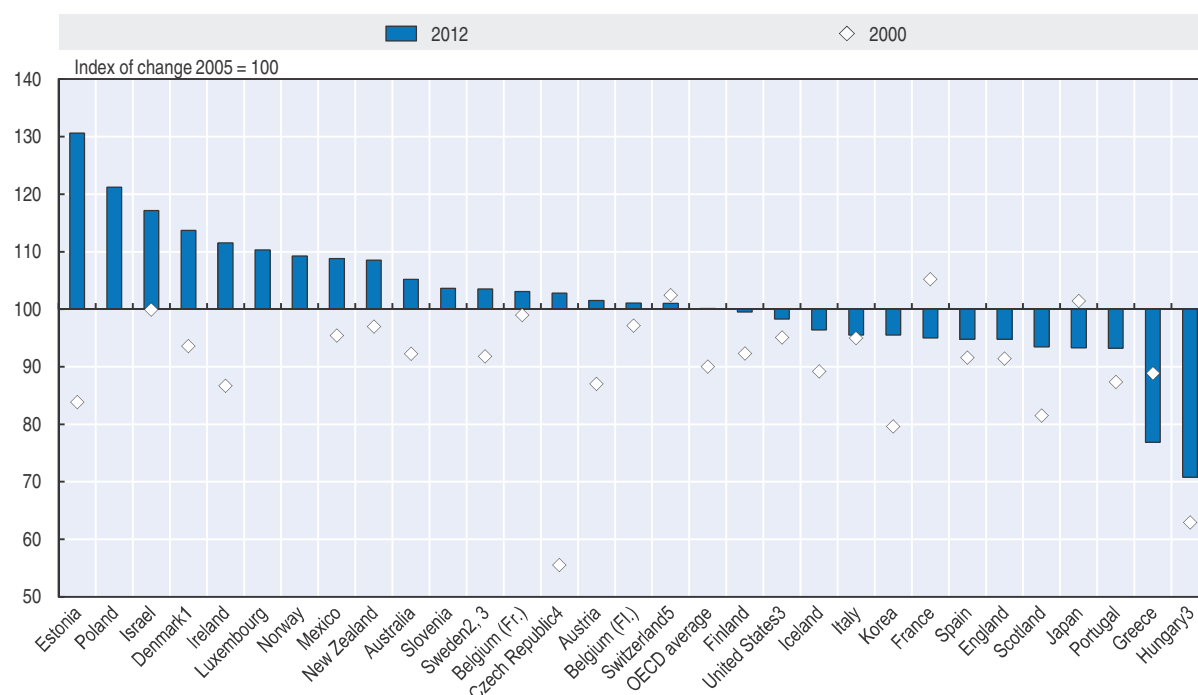


Notes: Data refer to actual salaries except for the following countries, for which statutory salaries were used: Austria, Canada, Ireland, Korea, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey. The "Actual" method refers to the ratio of average actual salary, including bonuses and allowances, for teachers aged 25-64 to earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education aged 25-64. The "Statutory" method refers to the ratio of teachers' statutory salary after 15 years of experience and minimum training (regardless of age) to earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education aged 25-64. For Belgium (French Community), Belgium (Flemish Community), England and Scotland, data on earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education refer to Belgium and the United Kingdom, respectively. Scotland includes all teachers, irrespective of their age. For Sweden, average actual teachers' salaries do not include bonuses and allowances.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>.

The typical total annual net teaching time is 732, 748, 652 and 609 hours in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and general upper secondary education respectively, below the OECD averages of 1 001 (pre-primary education), 782 (primary education), 694 (lower secondary education) and 655 (general upper secondary education) (OECD, 2014a). Figure 4.4 reflects self-reports of lower secondary teachers regarding actual hours worked during a week, positioning Flemish teachers slightly below the TALIS average.

Regarding the tasks other than teaching, for pre-primary and primary education teachers, the tasks associated with the required hours of presence at the school are defined at the school level and may include teamwork and dialogue with colleagues, supervising students during breaks, providing counselling and guidance to students, participating in school management, communicating and co-operating with parents or guardians and engaging in professional development activities. But some of these can also be performed outside the school, within teachers' working time, at the discretion of schools. In secondary education, these tasks are not required to be undertaken by teachers at the school but schools have the discretion to include them within teachers' working time. For all educational levels, individual planning and preparation of lessons is required and expected to be undertaken outside the school (OECD, 2014a). Figure 4.5 shows the average

Figure 4.3. **Change in lower secondary teachers' salaries (2000, 2005, 2012), for teachers with 15 years of experience and minimum training**

Notes: Countries are ranked in descending order of the index of change between 2005 and 2012 in the salaries of lower secondary teachers with 15 years of experience.

1. Break in time series following methodological changes in 2009.

2. Year of reference 2011 instead of 2012.

3. Actual base salaries.

4. Break in time series following methodological changes in 2012.

5. Salaries after 11 years of experience.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>.

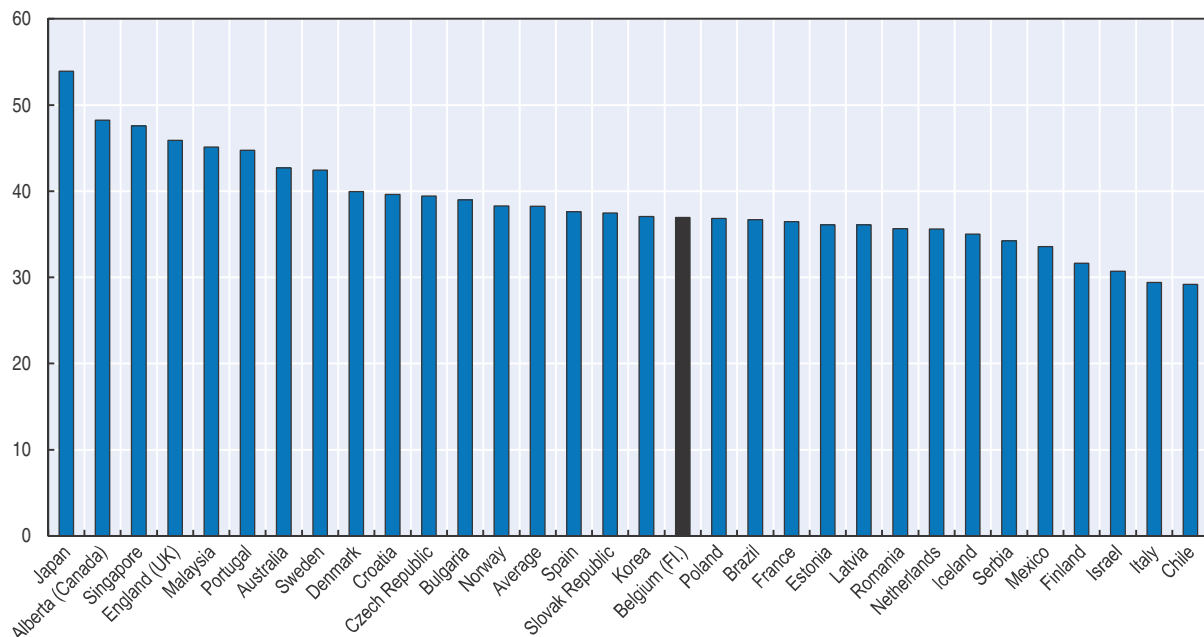
Table 4.2. **Regulations on teachers' time in the Flemish Community, 2014**

	Required number of 60 minute teaching periods per week	
	Minimum	Maximum
Mainstream pre-primary education	20	22
Mainstream primary education	20	23
Mainstream lower secondary education	18	19
Mainstream upper secondary education	17	18

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm>; Eurydice (2013), *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe*, EACEA, Brussels/Luxembourg.

number of hours lower secondary teachers report having spent on a variety of tasks for both the Flemish Community and the average among TALIS countries. It highlights the fact that Flemish teachers spent about the same time as teachers in other countries on teaching itself while they spend relatively less time on other tasks such as preparation of lessons, teamwork and dialogue with colleagues within the school, communication with parents or student counselling (OECD, 2014b).

Figure 4.4. Average number of hours lower secondary education teachers report having worked during the most recent complete calendar week, lower secondary education, 2013



Notes: A “complete” calendar week is one that was not shortened by breaks, public holidays, sick leave, etc. Also includes hours worked during weekends, evenings or other off-classroom hours. The sum of hours spent on different tasks (shown in Figure 4.5) may not be equal to the number of total working hours because teachers were asked about these elements separately. It is also important to note that data presented represent the averages from all the teachers surveyed, including part-time teachers.

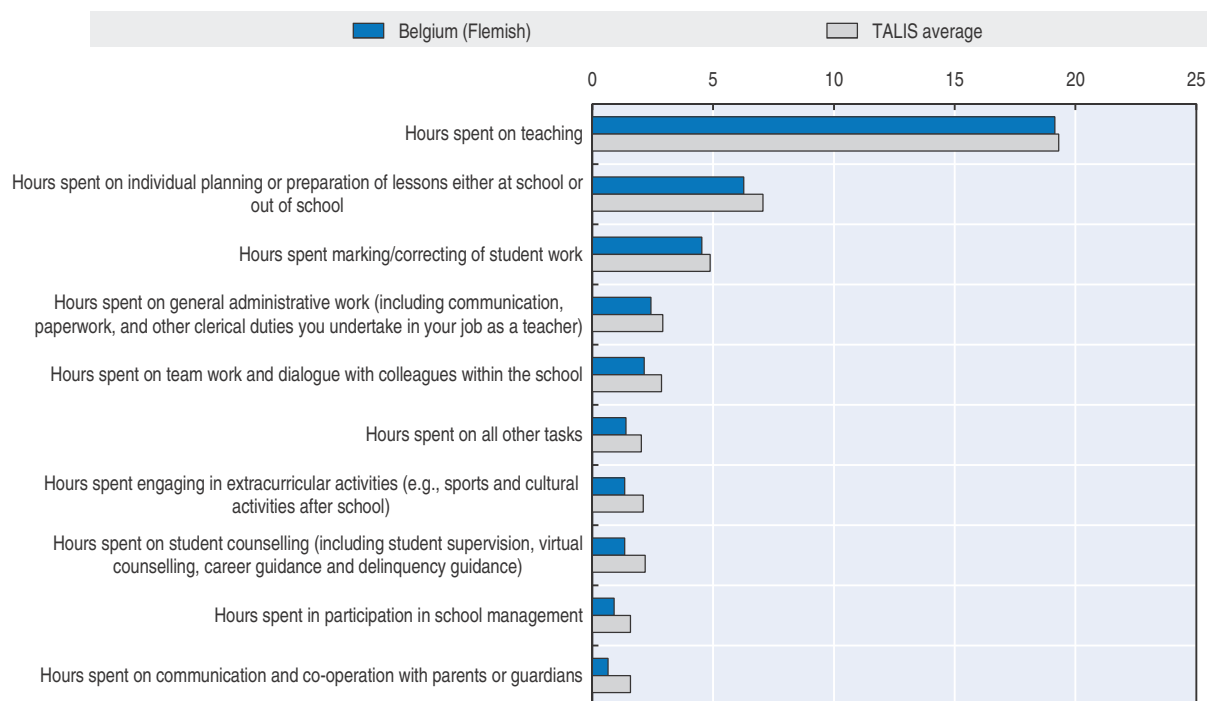
Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>.

As explained in Chapter 2, schools are free to decide on how they use the “teaching hours” they are allocated. School boards decide on the size of class groups, the distribution between actual teaching hours and hours for other tasks (e.g. special pedagogical tasks, professional development, participation in school management), and the sharing of hours between schools under the same school board. Teaching staff cannot be assigned to extra hours which are not derived from the “teaching hours” package the school receives, unless the school management pays these extra hours with extra resources from the school (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

Teacher evaluation

In the Flemish Community, individual teachers are evaluated within schools using an individual job description as a reference. Individual teachers need to undergo a formal evaluation at least once every four years. The evaluators are appointed by the school principal (or by the school board) and need to be individuals holding a higher hierarchical rank than the teacher. The evaluator may be the school principal, especially in elementary schools where there are typically no other management staff. According to Eurydice (2015), the evaluation process involves the following steps: i) appointment of evaluators, ii) drafting of the job description, iii) evaluation of the teacher, including coaching and guidance, and (iv) evaluation results described in a report and possible consequences. For more information, see Annex 4.A2.

Figure 4.5. Average number of hours lower secondary education teachers report having spent on the following activities during the most recent complete calendar week, Flemish Community of Belgium and TALIS average, 2013



Notes: A “complete” calendar week is one that was not shortened by breaks, public holidays, sick leave, etc. Also includes tasks that took place during weekends, evenings or other off-classroom hours. The sum of hours spent on different tasks may not be equal to the number of total working hours (shown in Figure 4.4) because teachers were asked about these elements separately. It is also important to note that data presented represent the averages from all the teachers surveyed, including part-time teachers.

Source: OECD (2014b), TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>.

Teacher professional development

In the Flemish Community, there is no mandatory requirement for teachers to undertake professional development. However, legislation requires that individual schools create the conditions for their teachers to undertake professional development, which is an expected duty of teachers. Schools receive funding for the professional development of their teachers. Its provision can originate at school, network and government level, but the principle is that schools and teachers retain their autonomy in decision making. Teacher professional development benefits from dedicated budgets at schools. By international comparison, affordability does not constitute an important barrier to participation in professional development. According to TALIS 2013 data, only 16.8% of Flemish lower education teachers agreed or strongly agreed that professional development being too expensive/unaffordable represented a barrier to their participation, the lowest figure among TALIS countries, against a TALIS average of 43.8% (OECD, 2014b).

Schools are responsible for their own professional development policies. They prepare a professional development plan for their staff. The plan includes key priorities, a time schedule and a budget for professional development activities. Teachers typically apply for professional development they would like to undertake through the school leader. The school leader is in charge of prioritising teachers’ training requests in line with the educational and pedagogical needs and conditions of the school. Schools are free to select

providers of professional development in a free market. In addition to funding professional development activities of their staff, schools often also fund travel expenses and course materials. Also, school-based professional development appears to be common practice, with teachers in the schools visited by the OECD review team reporting that their schools typically organised “study days” several times a year, bringing together all their teachers around a specific professional development activity.

By international comparison, the participation rates of Flemish teachers in professional development are about average. According to 2013 TALIS data, 88.9% and 88.2% of Flemish primary and lower secondary teachers respectively reported having participated in at least one professional development activity in the previous 12 months, quite similar to the TALIS averages of 89.7% and 88.4%, respectively (OECD, 2014b). Compared to teachers in other systems, Flemish lower secondary teachers in 2013 reported the highest levels of participation in activities such as courses or workshops, qualification programmes and courses in business premises, public organisations and non-governmental organisations. By contrast, relative to colleagues in other TALIS countries, Flemish lower secondary teachers were less involved in all other types of professional development, including education conferences, mentoring as part of a formal arrangement and a network of teachers.

Professional development is provided by a range of different institutions including universities, university colleges, pedagogical guidance services of school networks, private companies and the Ministry of Education and Training. Every year the Government sets a number of priority professional development themes and offers the corresponding training free of charge to all school networks (unless the maximum capacity of these courses is reached). Pedagogical advisory services of school networks, which are publicly funded, offer a range of services to the respective schools such as support in establishing school development plans, teacher evaluation and professional development. They are also providers of professional development activities. They can prepare tailor-made professional development programmes at the request of schools. The Ministry also makes available a database of professional development offerings to disseminate this information among teachers.

Other school staff

In addition to teachers and school leaders, other types of school staff are hired. These include support specialists (e.g. special needs co-ordinator, ICT co-ordinator, child care workers), administrative staff (e.g. secretaries, accountants), medical and paramedical staff in special schools (e.g. speech therapist, psychologist, physiotherapist) and maintenance staff (e.g. cooks, repairmen). The school boards recruit support staff on the basis of the financial capacities and needs of the schools. Most of these support staff are funded by the Flemish government.

Strengths

Teachers value their profession

Although there are challenges regarding the attractiveness of the teaching profession (more on this below), by international comparison, the job satisfaction among Flemish teachers appears high. According to TALIS 2013 data, 95.3% of Flemish lower secondary teachers reported that they are satisfied with their job, against a TALIS average of 91.2% (OECD, 2014b). Similarly, 84.6% of lower secondary teachers in the Flemish Community

reported that they agree or strongly agree that the advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages, against a TALIS average of 77.4%. A relatively low proportion of them (22.7%) wonder whether it would have been better to choose another profession, against a TALIS average of 31.6%. In addition, 45.9% of lower secondary Flemish teachers reported that they agree or strongly agree that the teaching profession is valued in society, the 9th highest figure among TALIS countries (the TALIS average being 30.9%). During the interviews with the OECD review team, Flemish teachers from all levels of education spoke of the many elements of the profession that they enjoyed, including the close work and interaction with young people, the passion for their subjects, the opportunities and challenges of working with students from different backgrounds, and the possibility of having a positive impact on students' learning and life choices.

Profiles of teacher competencies provide a good basis to plan initial education and professional development

Statements of basic teacher competencies, describing the knowledge, skills and attitudes graduates from initial teacher education need to acquire, were established for pre-primary, primary and secondary education in 1998, and updated in 2007. They provide the main reference for the development of initial teacher education programmes and may form the basis for entry into the profession. These basic competencies enable teachers to grow into “professional profiles”, which are targeted at practising teachers for the different educational levels. These professional profiles, also established in 1998 and updated in 2007, describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes of in-service teachers and guide the professional development of teachers. Both the basic competencies and the professional profiles cover teacher functions such as educator, content expert, organiser, innovator and researcher, partner of parents, member of a school team and member of the educational community (Eurydice, 2015).

The existence of teaching standards that provide a clear and concise profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do is a positive element for the management of the teaching profession. Teaching standards are essential mechanisms for clarifying expectations of what systems of teacher education and professional development should aim to achieve, offering the credible reference for making judgements about teacher competence, guiding teacher professional development, and providing the basis for career advancement. Clear, well-structured and widely supported teaching standards are a powerful mechanism to define what constitutes good teaching and align the various elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills (OECD, 2005). However, while the Flemish profiles of teacher competencies have potential to play such a role for the teaching profession in the Flemish Community, the review team formed the impression that they were not widely known in schools and that they did not seem to be systematically used to plan the professional development of teachers (more on this below).

Overall good provision of qualified teachers across the system

Internationally comparable information indicates that, on the whole, the Flemish Community is not facing a teacher shortage situation. PISA 2012 data reveal that the Flemish Community has an index of teacher shortage around the OECD average (Tables IV.3.37 and B2.IV.6, OECD, 2013a). As discussed in the previous chapters, the Flemish Community also stands out internationally as offering low student-to-teacher ratios and small class size across schools both in rural and urban locations. According to TALIS 2013 data based on

reports of primary and lower secondary teachers, the average class size stood at 18.0 and 17.3 in primary and lower secondary education respectively (against TALIS averages of 20.3 and 24.1). The average student-teacher ratio stood at 13.4 and 7.9 in primary and lower secondary education respectively (against TALIS averages of 13.5 and 12.4 respectively).

In addition, there are some indications that out-of-field teaching is not a major issue in the Flemish Community. This type of “hidden shortage” is said to exist when teaching is carried out by someone who is not fully qualified to teach the field/subject and is usually measured as the proportion of teachers teaching a subject in which they are not qualified. TALIS 2013 provides data on the proportion of lower secondary teachers in given subjects who have not had formal education or training at ISCED level 4 or higher or at the professional development stage for those subjects. In the Flemish Community, such proportions for teachers currently teaching reading, writing and literature; mathematics; science; and modern foreign languages were 3.7%, 4.6%, 7.4% and 6.3% respectively (against TALIS averages of 5.7%, 6.6%, 7.6% and 10.5% respectively) (OECD, 2014b).

However, this does not mean that the Flemish school system is not faced with specific instances of teacher shortage. According to 2013 TALIS data, 33.4% of lower secondary teachers were working in schools whose school principals reported that a shortage of qualified and/or well-performing teachers hindered the school’s capacity to provide quality instruction (the TALIS average was even higher at 38.4%) (OECD, 2014b). Schools facing more difficult socio-economic circumstances, especially in the larger cities, tend to encounter more difficulties to recruit experienced teachers (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). The projected increase of student numbers in the near future is likely to put more pressure on the recruitment of qualified teachers. However, an advantage of the Flemish Community is the flexibility of its initial teacher education system, especially its “specific teacher education”, which offers flexible pedagogical preparation to individuals with another graduate degree or with relevant professional experience, granting potential swift responses to the needs of the teacher labour market.

Teachers are recruited at the school level, which brings efficiency to the labour market

In the Flemish Community, there is considerable autonomy for the management of the teaching workforce at the school level. According to TALIS 2013 data, 100% of lower secondary teachers are in schools where the school principals report that considerable responsibility for appointing or hiring teachers is held at the school level (either by the school principal, other members of the school management team, teachers or the school governing board), against a TALIS average of 74.7%. The equivalent figure for dismissing or suspending teachers from employment is also 100%, against a TALIS average of 68.4% (OECD, 2014b). This is a significant strength in a system where schools are individually judged on their ability to improve student learning. A direct interaction with the applicants takes place, typically through interviews, and allows the use of a more complete set of criteria to match individual applicants’ characteristics to schools’ specific needs. School leaders are in a better position than more remote administrative levels to assess the specific needs of the school. The freedom of choice for parents, together with school leadership of teacher recruitment, provides incentives for schools to seek out specific teacher characteristics which align with their educational project. The process of open recruitment also offers advantages to applicants since they can more directly choose the school and identify with the school’s educational project. As a result, the process is more likely to build a sense of commitment of teachers to the schools where they are recruited.

Research based on cross-country analysis indicates that school autonomy in teacher recruitment is associated with higher student achievement levels. For example Wößmann (2003) used data from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to examine the relationship between different aspects of centralised and school-level decision-making and student performance. He concluded that students in schools with autonomy in deciding on the hiring of teachers performed statistically significantly better in mathematics and science than students in schools that did not have such autonomy. Better performance in mathematics and science was also observed among students in schools that could determine teacher salaries themselves.

However, it is important to note that school autonomy in teacher recruitment involves some complexity as there is the potential for an inequitable distribution of teachers (as schools with more resources and located in advantaged areas have greater potential to attract high quality teachers, see below) and opportunities for favouritism in teacher selection by schools. Avoiding the latter requires transparency in recruitment processes through making information about existing teaching openings publicly available. This is not yet fully the case in the Flemish Community (see below).

Schools are free to organise teacher hours as they see fit

In addition to recruitment, school leaders have considerable room to manage teacher resources. They are free to manage the teacher hours allocated to the school in the way they see fit. This grants them the ability to select the optimal distribution of teacher resources across classes and students and across roles and tasks within the school. This flexibility allows schools to adapt the use of teacher hours to the school's specific needs and the student characteristics of each school. The principle is to give autonomy to schools to allocate resources where they are most needed.

As described in previous chapters, disadvantaged schools receive extra resources which can be used in activities such as remedial classes for students with learning difficulties, extra language support, and student care and guidance (help with behavioural aspects and any aspects of student life that might negatively impact on performance). All the schools the review team visited had teacher hours allocated to these functions. This flexibility at the school level also gives teachers opportunities to diversify their roles in schools.

Schools also make an extensive use of part-time employment, which provides flexibility in responding to fluctuations in demand for teachers. According to TALIS 2013 data, 74.7% of Flemish lower secondary teachers were employed full-time (i.e. more than 90% of full-time hours), against a TALIS average of 82.4% (OECD, 2014b). Opportunities to work part-time can also be attractive to many people, and thus increase the potential supply of teachers.

Challenges

There are difficulties in attracting and retaining new teachers

There are indications that the teaching profession in the Flemish Community is not attracting the most suitable candidates and is facing challenges in retaining young professionals. In several meetings with the review team, it was referred that entrants into initial teacher education come in little proportion from the pool of best secondary graduates. There is also a challenge in attracting males and individuals with an immigrant background into initial teacher education so the teaching workforce better matches the characteristics of the student population.

Teacher retention in the initial years of the career is a concern. According to information on teacher attrition rates presented by the Flemish Minister of Education to the Flemish Parliament in March 2015, the total attrition rate of teachers aged younger than 30 in the Flemish Community for the period of 2009-14 was 17.1% on average across mainstream and special elementary and secondary education. Attrition rates were at 10.9% for mainstream pre-primary schools (12.8% for special pre-primary schools), 11.6% for mainstream primary schools (16.0% for special primary schools) and 23.1% for mainstream secondary schools (26.6% for special secondary schools).^{*} Teacher attrition reflects a degree of inefficiency in the management of the teaching workforce and is likely to be related difficult working conditions within schools for beginning teachers.

Part of the explanation lies in the fact that beginning teachers are more likely to obtain a teaching post in a disadvantaged school where working conditions can be particularly challenging given high levels of cultural and language diversity and more difficult socio-economic circumstances. In addition, beginning teachers face little job security for several years until they are able to obtain a permanent post, often having to move from one school to another in consecutive school years. While teacher salaries overall are quite competitive in the labour market, compared to the situation in other countries (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2), this is less so at the beginning of the career, especially when the teacher remains in a temporary post. These challenges will be discussed in more detail below.

A further aspect that teachers often mentioned in their interaction with the OECD review team as reducing the attractiveness of the profession was a high amount of administrative paperwork, including systematic minutes of meetings, documented year planning, and the need to justify their decisions in writing (e.g. failing a student, remedial strategies).

Concerns about the organisation of initial teacher education

During the OECD review visit, different groups raised concerns about the required minimum qualifications for pre-primary education, primary education and lower secondary education teachers, which are currently set at ISCED 5B level. Considering the OECD area, in primary education and lower secondary education, only the French Community of Belgium and Denmark also set qualification requirements at ISCED 5B level. In pre-primary education, only five other OECD systems set qualification requirements at ISCED 5B or below (OECD, 2014a). The duration of initial teacher education for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education is shorter than in most other OECD countries. In only one other school system (the French Community of Belgium), the duration of the initial teacher education for all lower secondary education teachers was three years as in the Flemish Community. For the primary education level this was the case for four other education systems, and for the pre-primary level it was the case for ten other systems. These qualification requirements are in stark contrast to the requirements of a master's level qualification for teachers at the upper secondary level. There is no reason why the level of education should be lower for teachers at pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education given similar professional demands. This approach is likely to have detrimental effects on the status of teachers at the pre-primary, primary and lower

^{*} These figures were provided by in response to Parliamentary question no. 310 by Caroline Gennez to Minister Hilde Crevits on 3 March 2015.

secondary levels, although it should be noted that teachers with a master's degree also frequently teach in special education (at all levels) and sometimes in mainstream lower secondary education.

Inadequate preparation of teachers for dealing with diversity in the classroom

Several of the groups and individuals interviewed by the OECD review team spoke of their perception that initial teacher education and continuing professional development did not adequately prepare teachers in several aspects of teacher practice, including subject didactics; teaching in a multicultural environment; differentiation of instruction; supporting language learning in all subjects; and teaching students with special educational needs. In the context of changing demographics of the Flemish student population and the current policy towards greater inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, it is of key importance that all teachers are adequately prepared to work in diverse classrooms and differentiate instruction effectively.

Speaking of Belgium as a whole, the OECD (2015) has noted that the language barrier to educational achievement is as strong amongst native-born students with foreign-born parents as amongst foreign-born students themselves. Also observed was Belgium's internationally low profile in the proportion of immigrant children in remedial language classes. Concern was expressed by respondents in the OECD review visit that immigrant children's access to specialist language support classes was too limited. Programmes were of short duration (typically one school year), and great reliance was placed on the teachers in mainstream classes and on social interactions in this setting. However, results from TALIS indicate that the Flemish Community had the fourth lowest percentage of teachers (8%) with recent training for teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting and this dimension is usually reported as a low-importance item in teacher appraisal and feedback.

Rigidities and imperfections in the teacher labour market

While the teacher labour market operates within a school system characterised by freedom of education and choice, it features a number of rigidities and imperfections. First, there are strict boundaries between school networks and, sometimes, even between school groups and school associations, concerning the acquired statutory rights of teachers. While teachers moving to a school in another network generally keep their pension rights and salary level, they will lose their permanent teacher status. Sometimes this is the case if they only move to another school board in the same network. This is a major obstacle to mobility of teachers across networks and school boards.

Second, while schools have good levels of autonomy in teacher recruitment, they are restricted in their choices by a number of strict regulations. Within a given school network (or school group/association), priority has to be given to the candidate with the highest level of seniority from among the candidates and teachers with permanent status have priority over temporary teachers. Other rules require that priority be given to those who have worked for a certain number of years and, where two candidates are equal in this regard, priority is given to those who have worked in the same network of schools, or been employed by the same organising authority. This might limit the extent to which schools select the candidate who best fits their needs and explains, in part, why often recruitment processes have a certain degree of informality (see below).

Third, the recruitment and selection of teachers is not always transparent. Schools and school boards do not seem to be required to advertise their teacher vacancies even if some of them do so on the school network's website or at the Flemish public employment service. School networks, groups or associations typically keep a list of potential candidates and often directly contact a potential candidate for a position in the school, while not organising a formal recruitment process. It seems that some schools prefer not to openly advertise vacancies because that would compel them to follow regulations in regard to recruitment, rules that may not suit school needs. In general, there also seems to be a lack of information to connect those looking for a teaching position with the schools seeking teachers. In order to address this concern, the Flemish public employment service and the Ministry of Education and Training have jointly established a web-based database of teacher vacancies in elementary and secondary education (www.vdab.be/leerkrachtendatabank).

Inequities in the distribution of teachers across schools

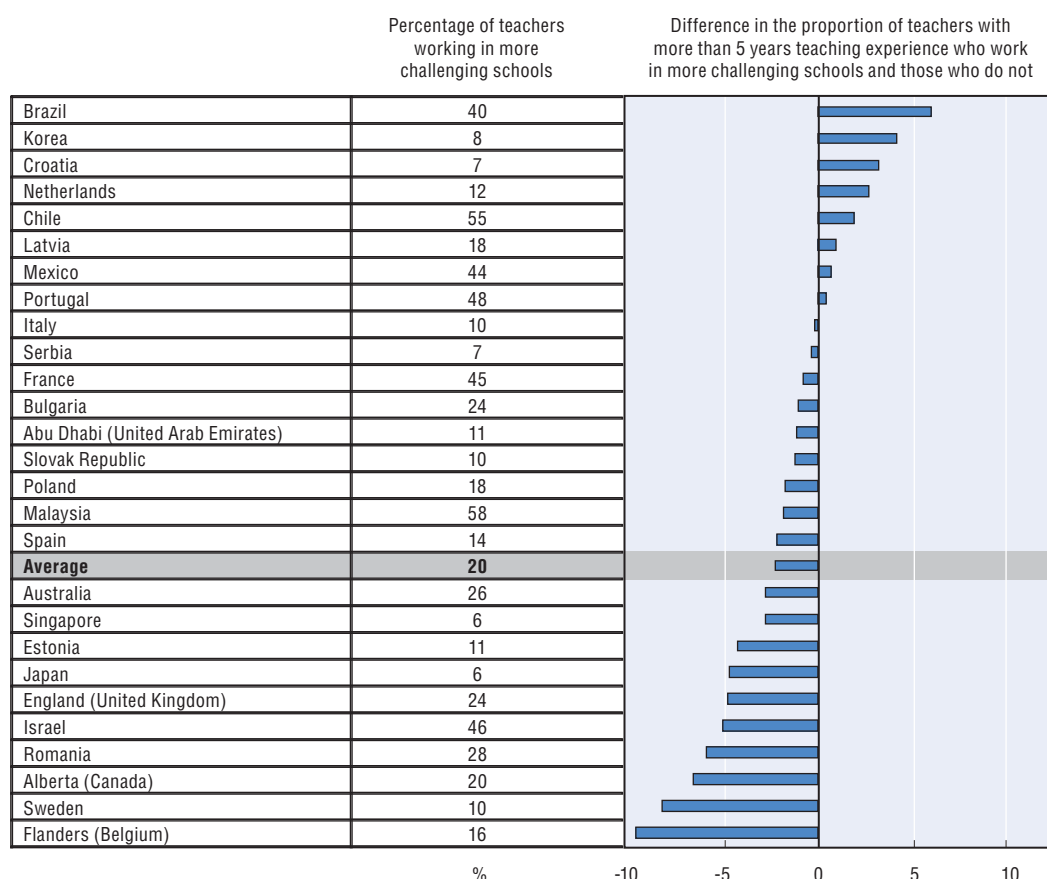
As explained above, recruitment at the school level combined with differences in resources across schools has the risk of leading to an inequitable distribution of teachers across schools. In the Flemish Community, there are indications that there is some inequitable distribution of teachers across schools, with the most experienced teachers typically employed in the least challenging schools. According to TALIS 2013 data, while 16% of lower secondary teachers worked in schools with more than 30% of students coming from disadvantaged home backgrounds, this was the case for 26.6% of beginning teachers (i.e. teachers with 5 years teaching experience or less).

This phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 4.6. In countries and economies found at the top of this Figure (with positive differences), experienced teachers are more likely to be working in schools with high proportions of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Figure 4.6 shows that for a majority of countries, however, the opposite is true. Negative difference scores on these graphs indicate that a larger proportion of more experienced teachers teach in less challenging schools. The Flemish Community appears at the bottom of the list, indicating that more experienced teachers are more likely to be in schools with a less diverse student population, whereas beginner teachers are more likely to be concentrated in schools with many students from disadvantaged home backgrounds. The European Commission (2015) highlights that there is an additional challenge of a particularly high turnover rate of relatively inexperienced teachers in Brussels schools.

In part this reflects the inability of the system to steer more qualified and experienced teachers to the neediest schools as no special incentives are available. Schools with disadvantaged student populations can receive more teaching hours but not necessarily more experienced teachers. The main response of the system to socio-economic disadvantage seems to be additional teacher hours, rather than a focus on the distribution of teachers and the quality of teaching. The funding system also tends to reinforce inequities across schools as schools enrolling students from socio-economically more advantaged backgrounds are in a better position to attract more experienced teachers and, as a result, receive more “teacher resources” in terms of government money invested in salaries.

Figure 4.6. Distribution of experienced teachers in more and less challenging schools, 2013

Proportion of lower secondary education teachers working in schools with more than 30% of students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes (referred to as “challenging schools”), and difference in the proportion of more experienced teachers working in more and in less challenging schools



Notes: Categorisation of more challenging schools is based on principals' estimates of the broad percentage in the schools of students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes.

Country data for categories representing fewer than 5% of the cases are not presented in this figure.

Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, Table 2.11, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>.

There are a range of fairness concerns in the organisation of the teaching profession

Hurdles throughout the career are uneven

As noted by a previous OECD report on teacher policy in the Flemish Community (McKenzie et al., 2004), another aspect that stands out is the unevenness of hurdles throughout the teaching career. Obstacles are quite high at the beginning of teachers' careers when they still have temporary status. During this period of the career, the teacher goes through a probationary period, may be appointed for short periods of time, can be replaced by teachers with a permanent appointment, may need to move from one school to another, and can be dismissed in a relatively straightforward manner. Once permanent status is acquired, the picture changes markedly, and the teacher acquires a significant level of job security together with virtually automatic salary rises over time (McKenzie et al., 2004). However, the introduction of the “temporary appointment of continuous duration” has brought some improvement to the employment conditions of beginning teachers.

Differences in status and working conditions across educational levels raise concerns

In the Flemish Community, there is a difference between the status of upper secondary teachers *vis-à-vis* that of teachers of other school levels. This is because required qualifications for teachers in upper secondary education are at the master's degree level while teachers in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education are at bachelor's degree level. This is the basis for considerable salary differences between teachers at the upper secondary level and other teachers. Figure 4.7 compares the statutory salaries of teachers with different levels of teaching experience across education levels in the OECD area. The Flemish Community of Belgium is the system where the ratio of salaries of upper secondary teachers to salaries of lower secondary teachers is the highest in the OECD area while it is the third highest when comparing salaries of upper secondary teachers to salaries of primary teachers. When the number of teaching hours is taken into account, as shown in Figure 4.8, the ratio of salary per teaching hour between upper secondary teachers and primary teachers is about 1.6, the second largest in the OECD area.

This situation is detrimental to the status of elementary and lower secondary school teachers and creates a bias of resources going into upper secondary education. There is no reason why qualification requirements should be distinct between upper secondary teachers and teachers of other school levels. Teaching requires similar competencies and levels of preparation regardless of the level at which teachers work. This situation also leads to unfair treatment of some teachers. For instance, secondary teachers who perform similar tasks in one given school but who have distinct qualification levels are in different salary scales. Also, primary education teachers with qualifications at the master's degree level may be paid according to the salary scale associated with bachelor's degree qualifications by some schools.

Distinct working conditions are not duly acknowledged

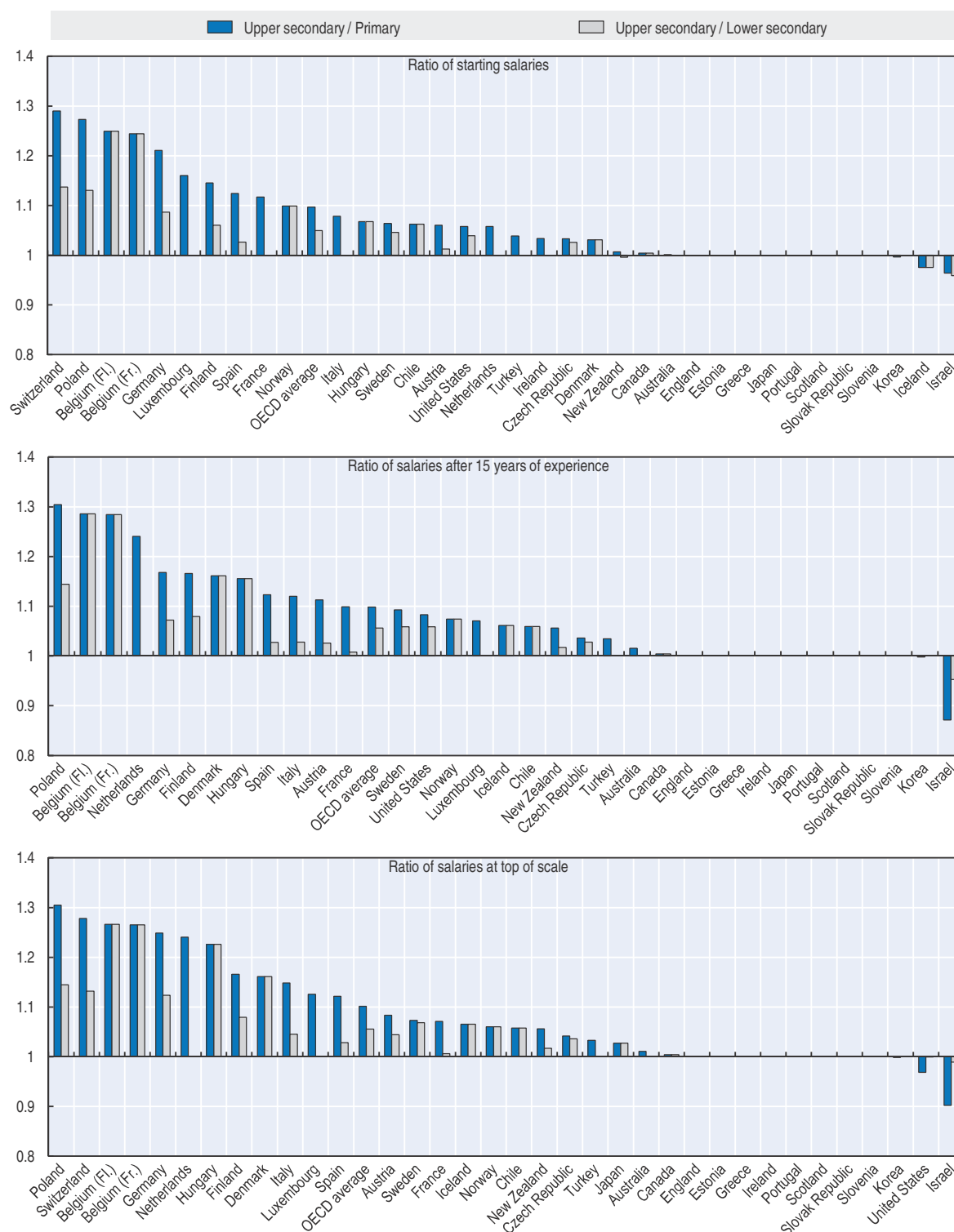
Little flexibility exists regarding teacher incentives. Teachers with a given set of qualifications and seniority are generally paid the same irrespective of their working conditions, level of shortages in the subject area, or school location. This restricts the ability of schools and the system as a whole to address staffing problems or to promote teacher mobility between schools and geographical areas. As explained earlier, working conditions of disadvantaged schools, given difficult socio-economic conditions and high levels of cultural and language diversity, can be particularly challenging for teachers. While these schools receive extra teacher hours, extra benefits to individual teachers are limited to potential smaller classes and fewer teaching hours so they can engage in remedial and other support for students with learning difficulties. However, these latter tasks are not formally recognised in the teaching career and are not always undertaken as part of the "special pedagogical tasks" assigned by the school management team. In fact, some of the non-teaching roles and time are often done on a voluntary basis and are not well defined, especially in those schools facing more difficult circumstances. This may lead to some unevenness of teachers' workload and does not provide any formal recognition to teachers' extra efforts, potentially having a detrimental effect on teacher motivation.

Conceiving teacher employment on the basis of teaching hours raises concerns

The conception of teacher employment in the Flemish Community, whereby basic compensation is associated mostly to the teacher's teaching load, is a source of concern. It implicitly assumes that teachers work further hours in other activities such as preparation

Figure 4.7. **Comparison of teachers' statutory salaries across education levels, public institutions, 2012**

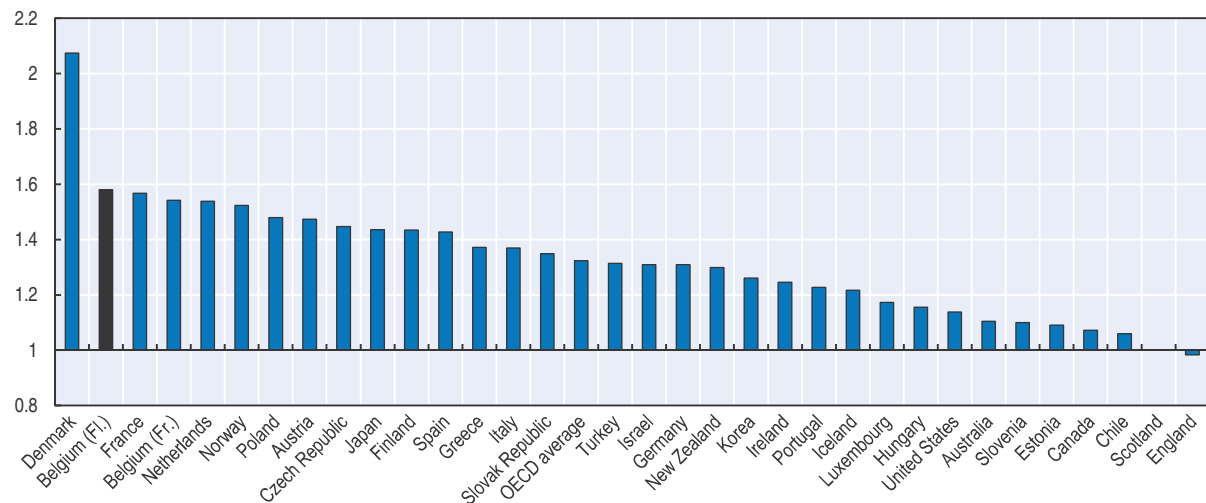
Ratio of salaries at different points of teaching experience, with minimum qualifications



Notes: For Hungary, Sweden and the United States, data refer to actual salaries. For Sweden, the reference year is 2011. For France, data include average bonuses for overtime hours for lower and upper secondary teachers. For the French Community of Belgium data refer to salaries of teachers with typical qualification instead of minimum.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>.

Figure 4.8. **Ratio of salary per teaching hour of upper secondary teachers to primary teachers after 15 years of experience, public institutions, 2012**



Notes: For Hungary, Sweden and the United States, data refer to actual salaries. For Sweden, the reference year is 2011.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>.

of lessons and assessment of students' work but does not explicitly recognise these activities. This approach limits the opportunities for teachers to formally engage in activities other than teaching at the school. Only in pre-primary and primary education is there a time requirement for presence at the school but the associated number of hours is only slightly above the expected number of teaching hours, which does not give much room for other activities within the school. TALIS 2013 data indicate that on average teachers in the Flemish Community invest less time than other countries in tasks other than teaching (see Figure 4.5). This limits teacher engagement in whole-school responsibilities, such as collaboration among teachers, school self-evaluation and improvement planning, which are important for raising the overall quality of teaching and learning at the school.

Teachers' opportunities for feedback and collaboration are limited

While there is a requirement for school principals to appraise their teachers once every four years, both school leaders and teachers interviewed by the OECD review team indicated that given the heavy workload of school principals such formal appraisal was not always systematically implemented for all teachers. Appraisal efforts are often concentrated on the least experienced teachers while appraisal may become an administrative formality for experienced teachers. According to TALIS 2013 data, while almost all Flemish teachers (97.9%) were in schools whose principals reported that teacher appraisal was implemented, 51.3% of Flemish teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that teacher appraisal and feedback were largely done to fulfil administrative requirements, slightly above the TALIS average of 50.6% (OECD, 2014b).

According to TALIS 2013 data, the proportion of lower secondary teachers who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that feedback is provided to teachers based on a thorough assessment of their teaching was 46.9%, similar to the TALIS average of 47.0%. Only 21.4% of lower secondary school principals reported that they often or very often observe instruction in the classroom, compared to an international average of 49%. Classroom

observation was more commonly reported as a tool frequently used by school principals at the primary level (29.1% against TALIS average of 33.1%) (OECD, 2014b). Schools have full autonomy in designing teacher appraisal processes and little is known at the system level regarding the actual aspects appraised and criteria used across schools for teacher appraisal. As a result, teacher appraisal is likely to vary across schools in terms of the methods used, the criteria applied and the use of the results.

Further, there seems to be little tradition of peer feedback among teachers in the Flemish Community. According to TALIS 2013 data, the proportion of teachers who reported never observing other teachers' classes and provide feedback was 74.9% and 75.2% in primary and lower secondary education respectively (against TALIS averages of 49.3% and 44.7% respectively). Similarly, the proportion of teachers who reported never taking part in collaborative professional learning was 31.0% and 45.1% in primary and lower secondary respectively (against TALIS averaged of 17.4% and 15.7% respectively) (OECD, 2014b). Clearly, few teachers seem to work as "critical friends" or peer mentors for one another in developing their practice. However, it should be noted that pedagogical advisory services from school networks were mentioned by several teachers interviewed by the OECD review team as a good source of feedback.

Where teacher appraisal exists, it appears that quite limited use is made of the appraisal results in order to inform teachers' professional and career development. According to 2013 TALIS data, in the Flemish Community only 28.9% of lower secondary teachers agree or strongly agree that teacher appraisal and feedback systems in their school are used to establish a development or training plan to improve their work as a teacher, against a TALIS average of 59.1% (OECD, 2014b). Similarly, only 34.0% of lower secondary Flemish teachers report a moderate or large positive change in the amount of professional development after they received feedback on their work at school, against a TALIS average of 45.8% (OECD, 2014b). There is clearly further room in the Flemish Community for better linking teacher appraisal to individual professional development, which is desirable given that teacher development is one of the main functions of teacher appraisal (OECD, 2013b).

In addition, there seems to be no systematic link between the results of teacher appraisal and teacher career development. The Flemish Community does not have a teacher certification system, where teacher appraisal could be used to certify teachers as fit for the profession. Teacher appraisal does not seem to be used to identify and reward good teaching performance through an association with career progression whereby higher levels of a career structure could be reached by teachers who reveal higher level skills (more on this below). The result is that there are fewer incentives for teachers to perform at their best and to improve knowledge and skills continuously. As there is no guarantee that all teachers are regularly appraised and have their practice observed, the system also lacks a mechanism to ensure that underperformance is identified and addressed.

Lack of a career structure with different steps recognising roles and responsibilities

In the Flemish Community, teachers do not benefit from a clearly established career structure with several steps, associated to a teacher certification process. Salaries are mostly defined in terms of qualifications and seniority and there are no opportunities for formal promotion within teaching (only out of teaching into selection offices or management functions). As a result, there is little formal recognition of the varieties of

roles and responsibilities that teachers actually perform at the school, as part of school's autonomy to organise their teacher hours. While teachers benefit from time allowances to perform other tasks at the school (e.g. remedial courses, student guidance), these are not formally recognised in their career.

In other countries, the existence of a multi-stage career structure for the most part accomplishes two important functions: the recognition of experience and advanced teaching skills with a formal position and additional compensation; and the potential to better match teachers' skills to the roles and responsibilities needed in schools, as more experienced and accomplished teachers may be given special tasks within schools (e.g. department co-ordinator, mentor teacher). These convey the important message that the guiding principle for career advancement is merit and have the benefit of rewarding teachers who choose to remain in the classroom. The lack of opportunities for promotion may contribute to reducing the attractiveness of the profession (OECD, 2005; 2013b).

Variations in school leadership capacity

Among the schools visited by the OECD review team, there were examples of schools where pedagogical leadership was highly developed with school leaders developing clear strategies for the recruitment, professional development and peer learning of their teaching staff. But the OECD review team formed the impression that there is variation across the Flemish Community in school leaders' capacity to organise these tasks successfully. This was also noted by a previous OECD review on school evaluation in the Flemish Community (Shewbridge et al., 2011).

School leadership has been a priority theme in the Flemish Community in the past. A range of important initiatives have been introduced in recent years by the Pedagogical Advisory Services and the umbrella networks have received public funding to run in-service training related to their own educational aims. However, although all school networks organise their own procedures and training courses for school leaders, these courses are not compulsory, except in the Community education network, where candidates for promotion to management functions are required to complete additional training. In the other networks, anyone who is allowed to teach can also become a school leader with no obligation to follow an additional training programme (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

School boards organise the recruitment of school leaders autonomously. National standards or common required competencies for school leaders do not exist, although the Community education network has developed a set of competencies that are required for its school leaders. In the context of freedom of education, it is the school boards' responsibility to determine school leaders' responsibilities, select and appoint school leaders and take responsibility for their further career development. The extent to which these tasks are done in a systematic or strategic manner is very much at the discretion of school boards.

Policy recommendations

Make the teaching profession more attractive

In light of the current demographic trends, it is important to ensure that well qualified candidates enter the teaching profession at an adequate rate. Even if there appears to be no overall shortage of teachers, it is important for the school system to ensure a given rate

of teacher renewal so the school system is continuously provided with new ideas and perspectives. It is also important that effective beginning teachers are retained in the profession. Responding to future teacher needs does not necessarily involve hiring a greater number of teachers but instead finding ways to better match teacher resources to student needs (e.g. possibly reducing the number of small classes in secondary education), improving the retention of effective beginning teachers, enhancing the mobility of teachers across the system (and the school networks) so instances of shortage are more easily addressed, and attracting talented individuals into the teaching profession.

A number of policies could strengthen the ability of the Flemish school system to ensure adequate teacher resources to meet the coming challenges. Priorities include improving the status of initial teacher education, including through raising the qualification requirements for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary teachers; improving the working conditions of beginning teachers by granting them greater job security; and enhancing their chances of working in less difficult schools (or be better compensated for working in more disadvantaged schools). These suggestions will be discussed in greater detail below. Efforts also need to be undertaken to reduce the administrative burden of teachers. Finally, the teaching profession itself needs to play a more active role in designing teacher education programmes, and determining who meets the criteria to enter the profession (i.e. introducing more self-regulation in the teaching profession). The views and experience of effective teachers and school leaders need to be central to the teacher education reforms.

Improve the provision and status of initial teacher education

Attract talented graduates from secondary education into teacher education

In order to make initial teacher education more attractive to high achieving graduates from secondary education, a number of strategies can be considered. These include: providing more information and counselling to prospective teacher students so that they can make well-informed enrolment decisions; procedures that try to assess whether the individuals wanting to become teachers have the necessary motivation, skills, knowledge and personal qualities (specific assessments); financial incentive schemes to recruit candidates with high-level competencies (such as higher education grants or loans with favourable conditions); and flexible programme structures that provide students with school experience early in the course and opportunities to move into other courses if their motivation towards teaching changes. There is also a need to develop specific strategies to attract males and individuals with an immigrant background into initial teacher education so the teaching workforce better matches the characteristics of the student population.

Enhance the status of teachers in elementary and lower secondary education

The above analysis points to the need to improve the status of teachers in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education by raising the qualification requirements for teaching at these levels. There is no reason, from the perspective of the professional roles and responsibilities of teachers, for qualification requirements of upper secondary teachers to be higher. The OECD review team would suggest developing a long-term strategy to raise qualifications requirements for all new teachers to the master's level. Of course, such a strategy would have significant budgetary implications as it would also require placing all teachers on a common salary structure regardless of the level at which they teach. New qualification requirements and steps towards convergence of salaries for

teachers at different educational levels would need to be phased in over time. The integration of the newly higher qualified teachers at the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels could potentially match the rate at which more experienced (and more “expensive”) teachers retire from the system, making it more feasible to transition to a new system. During the transition period, distinct salary scales would co-exist to reflect different qualification levels of teachers. The upgrade of qualification requirements could help contribute to the improvement of the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession as a whole. It is in line with the suggestion made in Chapter 2 to rebalance the resource effort between levels of education.

Strengthen the preparation for all teachers to deal with diversity and special educational needs

There is a clear need to strengthen the preparation of all teachers to deal with the diverse needs of their students. Teaching students with a different language background, from a disadvantaged family or with special educational needs should not be seen as an isolated task for specialist teachers (those offering counselling or remedial support) as this has become of the regular work of most teachers every day. Hence, it is of great importance to mainstream elements of teaching diverse classrooms in general initial teacher education and not just in separate or specialised courses. It is also imperative to ensure a relevant offer of professional development programmes for teachers to improve their ability to successfully address diversity in their classrooms.

Two dimensions of diversity are particularly relevant in the Flemish context. First, greater efforts are needed to strengthen the preparation of all teachers to instruct students with special educational needs. This is key to the current efforts to include students with special needs in mainstream schools. It calls for initial teacher education institutions to ensure that special needs becomes a regular area for the initial education of any teacher, regardless of the type of school at which he or she will teach. This would require going beyond the current concept of “specialisation” as a preparation for teaching special needs students. However, teachers concentrating on the teaching of special needs students should be required to obtain the associated more in-depth specialisation. In addition, it is also important to develop professional development programmes targeted at developing skills to support special needs students in mainstream schools.

Second, it is of high relevance to ensure that teachers give due attention to the language development needs of their students. An adequate preparation for diversity in the classroom and skills to provide student individualised attention will help teachers become more aware of individual language development needs and reduce the risk that they categorise immigrant students as having special education needs or learning difficulties because of language difficulties. Also, while early language support is essential, the school system has an important role in supporting the continued development of academic language of immigrant students over several years, and across all subjects. This requires intense co-ordination between language support teachers and subject teachers.

Programme provision in other countries with a high proportion of immigrant students recognises that acquiring the level of language proficiency to fully benefit from schooling is a prolonged process. While functionality in the everyday use of the host tongue may be achieved within 1-2 years, it takes much longer (5-7 years) for second language learners to “catch up to their age peers in academic language” (Ontario, 2007). In the state of New South Wales in Australia, the guidelines for the provision of English as a Second Language programmes are

based on a classification of learners into three phases. Phase 1 learners generally require nine months to move beyond a very basic level of proficiency, three years to move beyond Phase 2, and seven years to move beyond Phase 3 (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004). Added to individual variation in language growth (reflecting factors such as parental education) is the impact of differences in the school environments in which formal and informal learning is occurring. There are concerns about segregation in Flemish schools as there is in Belgium more widely (for Flemish schools, see Wouters and Groenez, 2013; for Belgium, see OECD, 2015: 71). This implies different learning conditions and challenges.

It is only since September 2014 that Dutch language proficiency of all commencing students in Flemish schools has been systematically assessed (OECD, 2015: 75). The question is whether adequate additional support is being provided and whether teachers are sufficiently prepared to provide such support effectively. This should be tested by suitably designed assessments of progress, including in different school settings.

Improve the transparency and effectiveness of the teacher labour market

Greater effectiveness in the functioning of the teacher labour market calls for better portability of statutory rights across school networks, more flexibility of recruitment regulations and a more systematic dissemination of teacher vacancies. First, improving the portability of statutory rights essentially involves ensuring the recognition of the permanent status of teachers across school networks, groups and associations (in addition to keeping the current portability of pension rights and salary levels). While legal obstacles to such recognition have been cleared, teacher recruitment traditions by network remain strong. Portability could be facilitated by a planning of permanent posts across schools undertaken at the system level in alignment with the establishment of a career structure i.e. defining posts at the system level as permanent and then assigning teachers to them through open competitions. This would facilitate teacher mobility across the Flemish school system.

Second, recruitment regulations whereby schools have to give priority to the candidate with a permanent appointment and preference to candidates from the same school network should be reviewed. Given the proposed career structure, whereby different stages correspond to distinct skills and experience, schools should feel free to target the competencies they most need – for given tasks and roles – regardless of the employment status of teachers. This would allow schools to better achieve the mix of experience and skills that is optimal for the challenges they face.

Third, a priority is to improve the information flow in the teacher labour market. The development of transparent and prompt systems to close the information gaps between teachers and schools is essential for an effective functioning of the teacher labour market, especially in a system where schools are more directly involved in teacher recruitment and selection. This should involve the requirement that schools advertise their teaching vacancies and the development of websites at the system, network and group level where information about teacher vacancies is systematically made available (also building on the existing website initiative by the Ministry of Education and Training and the Flemish public employment service). Existing initiatives in this area should be further expanded. This is likely to considerably improve the transparency of teacher recruitment at the school level.

Work towards a more equitable distribution of teachers across schools

In complement to the current approach of addressing socio-economic disadvantage through the provision of additional teacher hours, the response to the current inequities in

the distribution of teachers across schools could involve a twofold strategy. First, incentives should also target individual teachers so disadvantaged schools are in a better position to attract more experienced and higher quality teachers. This would involve paying special allowances and support for teachers who work in schools facing more challenging circumstances. This should be in addition to non-salary strategies such as lower class contact times or smaller classes, for schools working with socio-economically less advantaged students or schools which have particular needs. The objective would be to compensate individual teachers for the more challenging working conditions. Given the concentration of beginning teachers in disadvantaged schools, this could also help lower the high levels of teacher attrition in the first few years of the career. The principle of targeted allowances could also apply to areas or subjects in which teachers are in short supply.

Second, based on the above analysis, the OECD review team suggests working towards a more equitable distribution of expenditure for teacher salaries across schools. As explained earlier, schools enrolling more socio-economically advantaged students are in a better position to attract more experienced teachers, and the Flemish Community *de facto* provides more resources to these schools in terms of actual salaries paid to the hired teachers. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a lack of transparency about the real level of funding for teacher salaries across different schools. Ensuring greater transparency in this area would help stimulate a debate around the inequities created by this system in terms of actual resources invested per student, and the need to move towards a fairer distribution of resources across schools.

In addition, steps could be taken to make schools take responsibility for the cost impact of their hiring decisions and work within a defined budget for teacher salaries. Moving towards a system that provides resources for teacher pay on the basis of a normative for teacher salary (e.g. salary of an “average-experience” teacher) rather than on the basis of actual teacher salaries could provide greater opportunities to disadvantaged schools to either: i) pay a salary allowance to attract more experienced teachers to their school (in case the suggested teacher allowance for difficult working conditions is paid through the school); or ii) hire a greater number of teachers with less experience given that they would benefit from an overall greater budget for teacher salaries. Such an approach would also be consistent with a concept whereby schools seek a diverse teaching body in terms of experience and background and not necessarily the greatest possible number of experienced teachers.

Reconceptualise teacher employment on the basis of a workload system

Making the work of teachers more effective in the Flemish Community could also benefit from a new concept of teacher employment. One option would be to move to employment under a workload system, whereby teachers work a specified number of hours per week (e.g. 40 hours), a proportion of which are devoted to teaching. This would involve stipulating the required number of working hours (and possibly hours required to stay at the school) but not necessarily the number of teaching hours. This concept of teacher employment recognises that teachers need time for engaging in a range of other tasks, including the adequate preparation of lessons. This is likely to improve the opportunities for teachers to formally engage in activities other than teaching at the school level. In particular, school management would be in a better position to foster teacher collaboration, promote whole-school planning and develop professional learning communities. This would also favour the promotion of peer feedback and joint work among teachers.

Ensure that all teachers have opportunities for regular professional feedback and relevant professional learning

While there is a requirement for school leaders to appraise their teachers every four years, the above analysis indicates that teachers do not have sufficient opportunities for regular professional feedback. To strengthen school-based teacher appraisal it is important to enhance pedagogical leadership in schools. This would imply improving school leader's skills for effective observation, feedback and coaching. A more systematic use of the existing teaching standards could help provide a common basis for school-based teacher appraisal and make it more consistent across schools. At present, school leaders' involvement in teacher appraisal and coaching is still rather limited. School leaders, especially in elementary education, report that this is also related to a lack of time and administrative support.

In this context, it is also important to promote more distributed leadership and involvement of senior peers in regular teacher evaluation, classroom observation, and planning of professional development. In addition, it is important to develop a culture where teachers to engage informally in observations of each other's practices with the objective of fostering mutual learning among teachers. These practices would benefit from a new concept of teacher employment based on working hours (rather than teaching hours, see above) whereby the formal recognition of activities other than teaching at the school would promote collaborative work among teachers. At the same time, increased peer mentoring and work among groups of teachers would decrease the dependency on an external service for pedagogical advice. Pedagogical advisors could work more with groups of teachers and school leaders to build professional learning communities and ensure that they have up to date knowledge on effective practice.

For teacher appraisal to have an impact on learning outcomes in the school, it needs to be closely connected to professional development. This link is not yet systematic in Flemish schools. At the school level, teachers' individual choices of professional development should be more strongly influenced by i) their own appraisal results and identification of areas for improvement, and ii) priorities of the school development plan. Effective teacher appraisal should give teachers a choice from a range of professional learning activities that meet their individual needs in relation to the priorities of the school's overall development plan. The appraisal results of individual teachers should also be aggregated to inform school development plans. In Korea, for example, results of the teacher peer review processes not only feed into teachers' individual professional development plans, but are also used to inform a synthetic report on professional development for the whole school bringing together the results of all appraised teachers (without identifying individual teachers) (Kim et al., 2010).

In order to guarantee the systematic and coherent application of school-based teacher appraisal across Flemish schools, it would be important to ensure external validation of the respective school processes. While the use of teaching standards as the main reference for teacher appraisal will support the consistency of school-based teacher appraisal across schools, there is still a need to ensure these processes are appropriately conducted in all schools. This should be part of the school boards' processes to appraise school leadership.

Strengthen the capacity of school leadership

Flemish school leaders enjoy a high level of autonomy and responsibility, including for ensuring that all their staff receive formal and informal opportunities for feedback and

professional learning. Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that given their potential impact on policy implementation, efforts to improve school leader recruitment and career advancement, including appraisal and ongoing professional development, can constitute highly cost-effective measures for improving teaching and learning in schools. In fact, several countries recognised the potential high rates of return on investments in improving school leadership during the 2012 International Summit on the Teaching Profession (Asia Society, 2012; Schleicher, 2012). In this context, the OECD review team recommends further building the capacity of school leaders as a key priority of the Flemish school system.

In an OECD review of school evaluation in the Flemish Community, Shewbridge et al. (2011) recommended that the following elements should be part of a national strategy for strengthening school leadership: establishing a Flemish framework for leadership competencies; developing new leadership roles; refining leadership training; and providing appropriate and accessible resources. Further developing the performance appraisal of school leaders was also recommended as an important area for policy development so that leaders themselves can receive external feedback and targeted support to improve practice. For this purpose, the Flemish authorities could consider to provide further support and materials for school boards on how to organise school leadership appraisal effectively. It would also be helpful to ensure that the evaluation of school leadership is part of school self-evaluation activities and that the Inspectorate has access to and reviews documentation from school leader appraisals as a basis for its inspection visits (for more detail, see Shewbridge et al., 2011).

Consider establishing a common teacher career structure linked to teacher certification processes

The OECD review team noted that the absence of a career structure for teachers undermines the formal recognition of the varieties of roles and responsibilities that teachers actually perform at the school, in the context of schools' autonomy in managing the teaching workforce. There is no mechanism to more formally link acquired skills and experiences with specific roles to be performed at the school. As a result, schools and teachers could benefit from a career structure for teachers that comprised a range of career steps or pathways, associated with distinct roles and responsibilities in schools in relation to given levels of teaching expertise. Access to different steps or pathways should be voluntary and be associated with formal processes of evaluation.

An important objective should be to align expectations of skills and competencies at different stages of the career (as reflected in teaching standards or professional profiles) and the responsibilities of teachers in schools (as reflected in career structures). Such alignment would reflect the principle of rewarding teachers for accomplishing higher levels of expertise through career advancement and would strengthen the linkages between responsibilities in schools and the levels of expertise needed to perform them (OECD, 2013b). Such a career structure should formalise opportunities for greater career diversification, which are likely to have a positive motivational effect and increase the attractiveness of the profession.

It would be beneficial to introduce a teacher certification or registration system to regulate access to different stages of a multi-stage career structure proposed above. Such certification or registration processes officially confirm teachers as competent for teaching practice. Teachers could be provisionally registered upon completing initial teacher education and advancement to fully certified teaching status could occur upon successful

completion of a probationary teaching period and/or following an appraisal against certification criteria. A teacher certification or registration system would offer the opportunity to re-balance job security between temporary and permanent teachers. The objective would be to move to a system whereby following an initial probationary period (and the associated mentoring programme), teachers would have the opportunity to go for certification to obtain a permanent post. This permanent post would then need to be confirmed periodically through the re-certification process. In this approach, teachers achieve employment security by continuing to do a good job, rather than by regulation that effectively guarantees their employment.

In countries where teacher certification or registration exists, the process typically involves external evaluators or a national teaching council or agency responsible for teacher certification to ensure fairness and consistency. After teachers have become fully registered, they typically have to renew their certification status every few years. This can be organised in different ways and could involve a simple attestation by a school-based committee (preferably with an external member) that the teacher is continuing to meet the agreed standards of practice. Teacher certification would have as its main purposes providing public assurance with regard to teachers' standards of practice, determining advancement in the career, and informing the professional development plan of the teacher. This approach would convey the message that reaching high standards of performance is the main road to career advancement in the profession.

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ANNEX 4.A1

*Number of school staff, by level, type of education
and School Network, 2008, 2011, 2014*

Table 4.A1.1. **Number of school staff, by level, type of education and school network, 2008, 2011, 2014**

	2008		2011		2014	Change of total staff between 2008 and 2014 (%)
	Management and teaching staff	Total staff	Management and teaching staff	Total staff	Total staff	
Mainstream Elementary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	6 989	7963	7096	7990	8601	8.0
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	10 904	11 759	11 156	12 178	13 135	11.7
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	28 335	30 606	28 559	31 185	32 810	7.2
Total	46 228	50 328	46 811	51 353	54 546	8.4
Special Elementary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	1 351	2 681	1 496	2 181	2 279	-15.0
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	882	1 144	913	1 217	1 253	9.5
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	3 556	4 632	3 699	4 869	4 988	7.7
Total	5 789	8 457	6 108	8 267	8 520	0.7
Total Elementary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	8 340	10 644	8 592	10 171	10 880	2.2
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	11 786	12 903	12 069	13 395	14 388	11.5
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	31 891	35 238	32 258	36 054	37 798	7.3
Total	52 017	58 785	52 919	59 620	63 066	7.3
Mainstream Secondary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	10 859	12630	11111	12734	12469	-1.3
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	5 380	5988	5283	5890	5642	-5.8
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	40 016	44459	39388	43875	42402	-4.6
Total	56 255	63077	55782	62499	60513	-4.1
Special Secondary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	1 229	1536	1381	1702	2016	31.3
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	751	870	813	938	1014	16.6
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	3 585	4159	3953	4588	4914	18.2
Total	5 565	6565	6147	7228	7944	21.0
Total Secondary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	12 088	14166	12492	14436	14485	2.3
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	6 131	6858	6096	6828	6656	-2.9
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	43 601	48618	43341	48463	47316	-2.7
Total	61 820	69642	61929	69727	68457	-1.7
All levels of education						
Community Education (GO!)	20 428	24810	21084	24607	25365	2.2
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	17 917	19761	18165	20223	21044	6.5
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	75 492	83856	75599	84517	85 114	1.5
Total	113 837	128 427	114 848	1293 47	131 523	2.4

Notes: Based on full-time equivalents. "Total staff" include school principals, deputy-principals, teaching staff, administrative staff, manual staff in Community Education, educational support staff, paramedic staff, staff of student guidance centres, inspectorate staff, educational advisors, staff in boarding schools and child care workers in nursery education. Data only on "Management and teaching staff" were not available for 2014.

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2014; 2011; 2008), *Flemish Education in Figures*, <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/onderwijsstatistieken>, 2013-14, 2010-11 and 2007--2008 editions.

ANNEX 4.A2

Main features of the teaching profession: initial education, employment status and teacher evaluation

Initial education

Following a reform of teacher education undertaken in 2007, two types of teacher education programmes are offered (Eurydice, 2015):

- **Integrated teacher education programmes:** These are professional 3-year Bachelor of Education degree programmes (pre-primary, primary, or secondary education) which integrate subject-specific and pedagogical components. They are offered by university colleges. These programmes involve a practical component (practice in a school) corresponding to 45 credits (against a total of 180 credits for the programme). The secondary education programme involves two teaching subjects. Quality assurance follows the usual procedures in higher education: self-evaluation, external reviews and accreditation.
- **Specific teacher education:** These are programmes attended in addition to or after a subject-specific initial programme (at bachelor's or master's level) or a particular form of professional experience. They are offered by university colleges (mostly for graduates of professional bachelor's degrees), universities (for graduates of master's programmes) and centres for adult education (CVO) (open to everyone, including holders of a diploma of secondary education). These programmes are targeted at individuals who have a higher education or adult education degree or who have relevant professional experience and only need additional pedagogical training to enter teaching. The programmes comprise a workload of 60 credits of which 30 credits are specifically dedicated to the practical component, reflecting the integration of theory and practice. The practical component can be undertaken during the programme (pre-service training) or while on the job (in-service training, in a Trainee Teacher position). Specific teacher education programmes can come in three forms: i) as a "built-in" programme, in other words as a specialisation in a subject-specific programme (e.g. university colleges and universities can offer a 30-credit teacher education programme as part of a 120-credit master's programme); ii) as a programme contiguous to a subject-specific programme; and iii) as a separate training programme for individuals who wish to switch to a teacher career following another professional experience.

During initial teacher education and throughout their first year teaching in a school, teacher students receive guidance from the mentor in the school and from the training counsellor, a member of the staff at the initial teacher education institution. A similar

approach is followed for trainee teacher positions, in the context of specific teacher education. Quality assurance of initial teacher education is done by means of self-evaluation and external reviews (there is not accreditation of programmes).

Employment status

There are three stages in the contractual status of teachers (Eurydice, 2015):

- **Temporary appointment of definite duration:** All starting teachers are given a temporary appointment of definite duration, which does not exceed one year, can be renewed, and is associated with either a vacant or non-vacant position.
- **Temporary appointment of continuous duration:** Following a minimum of 720 days teaching, spread over a minimum of three school years, the teacher can be given a temporary appointment of continuous duration (i.e. is automatically renewed if the respective school is funded the associated teaching hours), which is associated with either a vacant or non-vacant position. The provision of this contractual status is based on a priority system and requires that the latest teacher evaluation did not rate the teacher's performance as "insufficient".
- **Permanent appointment:** A permanent contract can be granted if: i) a permanent position is available and the teacher successfully applies for the post; ii) the teacher accumulated a minimum of 720 days of service of which at least 360 days were in the position to which the teacher is to be permanently appointed; and iii) the teacher held a temporary position of continuous duration on the 31 December preceding the permanent appointment.

Teacher evaluation

Teachers in the Flemish Community undergo a formal evaluation by the school leadership at least once every four years. The evaluation process involves the following steps (Eurydice, 2015):

- **Appointment of evaluators:** Each teacher has two evaluators who work at the same school or in another school belonging to the same school board. The first evaluator is in charge of guidance and coaching while the second evaluator assesses the teacher's performance. Training for evaluators, for which the Flemish Government provides funding, is recommended.
- **Drafting of the job description:** The job description is drafted by the first evaluator in consultation with the teacher. It consists of three parts: i) the tasks and school-related assignments and the manner in which the teacher must carry them out; ii) the school-specific objectives; and iii) the rights and obligations regarding professional development.
- **Evaluation of teacher, including coaching and guidance:** The evaluation typically involves classroom observation and an evaluation interview in which the performance of the teacher is discussed against his or her job description.
- **Evaluation results, including possible consequences:** The evaluation results are described in a report, which includes a rate. Temporary members of staff, appointed for a definite period of time, are dismissed if they receive the "insufficient" rate. In the case of permanent teachers or temporary teachers appointed for a continuous duration, dismissal occurs when the teacher receives two consecutive "insufficient" rates or when the teacher receives three "insufficient" rates throughout the career. In case an

“insufficient” rate does not lead to dismissal, the teachers will need to undergo a new evaluation within the next 12 months of service. In case of disagreement with the evaluation conclusions, the teacher has the possibility to appeal to the evaluation board. Personal and development objectives can also be added to the job description following an evaluation.



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