

**Good practices in Social Dimension Implementation in Higher Education
Belgium – Flemish Community**

Widening participation - **Policy objectives** are:

- getting more young people to and through higher education in a way that promotes social cohesion and that addresses the demographic trends;
- improving the attainment and achievement for those who are most at risk of failing in higher education programmes;
- reducing the educational attainment gap between the different groups participating in higher education.

Driving forces or rationales are:

- increasing the student numbers and the participation rates;
- the belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experiences;
- social justice: higher education has an important role to play in fostering equity and social justice to the wider society;
- contributing to social and economic development;
- tapping the pool of talent;
- participation in higher education is important because of its implications for an individual's chances in life.

Central to the policy is access to and participation in higher education, but also progression and success within it. It is not just about access to higher education but it is also about completion.

Policy instruments are:

- Funding: provide incentives to institutions for improving access and participation of students coming from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in society (ethnic minorities, lower socio-economic groups, disabled students) and for improving the outcomes; funding is tied to performance through the funding mechanism as well as through performance agreements;
 - o Through the funding mechanism (from 2008) (in the formula based block grant): the funding mechanism applies higher weights for:
 - students from underrepresented socio-economic groups;

- disabled students
- working students, provided that the institution has specific provisions in place

The aim is to provide financial rewards to institutions that enrol and graduate high numbers of grant recipients and other at risk students.

- Through performance agreements on diversity targets (between each HEI and the minister of education): These performance agreements cover an increase in participation of specific student target groups and an incentive for the institutions to support student achievement and progression and to improve academic success, especially the achievement and success of students from more vulnerable backgrounds (lower socio-economic status, migrants, disabled students,...) . HEIs are encouraged to develop their own approaches depending on such multiple factors as their local and geographical context and environment, the supply of study programmes, their partnerships, information and guidance, student support in terms of teaching and learning, support for students as a function of their financial status, disability, mental health and well being, pastoral support, summer classes, bridging courses for students coming from a non-academic track, language courses, students as tutors for high school students, distance education, lifelong learning as a means for broadening participation, recognition of prior learning, monitoring academic progression.

First round of performance agreements : from 2008 – 2011
Budget from the government: 6 mio euro yearly
There is an evaluation going on for the moment (first round). If necessary, there will be an adjustment of the process.

Second round: from January 2012.

- Curriculum reform: HEIs have ample room to provide flexible learning opportunities including curricula;
- Further development of vocational oriented study programmes at level 5 (associated degrees – 90- 120 ECTS study points); graduates of those study programmes can progress to Bachelor degrees on successful completion of a shortened study programme of about 90 ECTS study points at level 6;
- Graduates of the professional Bachelor study programmes can progress to academic Master study programmes on successful completion of a bridging programme. University colleges are enrolling more students coming from a lower SES background than the universities. The majority of the enrolments at the university colleges has



Belgium – Flemish Community - Good practices in Social Dimension implementation in Higher Education



completed a technically or vocationally oriented secondary education track. Those secondary education tracks are not preparing well for university academically oriented study programmes. Those bridging programmes give the graduates from professionally oriented bachelor degree courses a real opportunity to get access to a master programmes. Some master programmes are specially designed for this purpose (nursing, social work, ergotherapy).