

## REPORT ON CURRICULUM INNOVATION: BELGIUM

Becks  
DRAFT  
Hogeschool  
Antwerpen

Daniël  
Lessius

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. The system of higher education

##### 1.1.1. Recent changes in the system of higher education

In 1993 Belgium became a federal state composed of three linguistic communities (Flanders, Wallonia, the German-speaking region) and four regions (the ones that were just pointed out and Brussels). Responsibility for language policy lies now mainly with the communities. This means that in Flanders, Wallonia and in the German-speaking parts the regional governments are in charge of language policies and higher education.

The system of higher education in Belgium comprises (1) university education and (2) higher non-university education. The second type of education is called either **one cycle education**, when education consists of a three or four year study cycle, or **academic level education** when education consists of two cycles of two years each. The academic type of education includes for instance translation and interpreting. Since the 1994 Flemish law on higher non-university education the differences with universities at the level of staffing requirements have all but disappeared. A few years later Wallonia adopted a similar system. Moreover, graduates obtain the same type of degree, i.e. "licencié/licentiaat". The doctoral degree can only be obtained at the universities.

##### 1.1.2. The impact of the Bologna Declaration

At the moment, compiling a report on curriculum innovation in Belgium is a hazardous affair: the Bologna declaration has meant that a lot of changes have been put on hold while discussions about the implementation of Bologna are being conducted. Bologna, it is believed, will affect both structure and content of all types of higher education. The introduction of the Bachelor- (3 yr) and Master- (1 or 2 yr) degrees is a major challenge to all universities and institutions of higher education: the present 'candidat/kandidaat' degree (after 2 yrs) is an intermediate qualification while the Bachelor-degree envisaged by Bologna should provide a professional qualification and prepare students for the European job market. Bachelors cannot be

'candidats/kandidaten' with something added on. Bologna requires a complete rethinking of higher education from the bottom up.

Moreover, the Bologna declaration seems to imply that the Master-degree should be conceived of as situated between the present 'licencié/licentiaat' and the doctorate. It is an extra qualification but by no means a requirement for successful entry on the job market. Since the discussion on the implementation of Bologna is still at an early stage, it is impossible to predict the final results.

## **1. 2. Identification of relevant changes in the social, political, cultural, professional and economic environments**

In 1993 education became a regional matter, with a Flemish and a Walloon Ministry of Education. There have been no other relevant changes in the Belgian situation in the past 10 years, apart from the growing internationalisation which characterizes the EU.

## **LANGUAGE DEGREE PROGRAMMES**

### **2. Innovations in language degree programmes offered by universities**

#### **2.1. Traditional language programmes**

Traditional language programmes include language degrees with a main focus on literary studies, often known as 'philology'.

##### **2.1.1. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes**

**Undergraduate programmes.** Undergraduate programmes refer to the first two years of university education, also called the first cycle or "candidatures/kandidaturen". The programmes in language and literature have to conform to the various decrees issued by the Dutch or French-speaking communities.

The following study programmes in modern languages are offered by all universities: Germanic languages (i.e. Dutch, English, German) and Romance languages (i.e. French and/or Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Rumanian, Catalan and Provençal). One university offers Scandinavian languages (i.e. Danish, Swedish and Norwegian). Except for Scandinavian languages, students are expected to study at least two languages but the number of hours devoted to the second language as well as the number of languages offered may differ among universities.

The organisation presented above implies that Dutch speakers in Flanders and Francophone speakers in Wallonia study their respective mother-tongues and another language if they opt for Germanic languages or Romance languages. The Germanic language programmes consider all languages on an equal level. This is not always the case for the Romance language programme, where usually more attention is paid to French than to the other Romance languages. In the case of Scandinavian languages only Swedish is studied. Danish and Norwegian are only offered on an optional basis.

**Graduate programmes.** Graduate programmes refer to the third and fourth year of the university education, the second cycle or “licencie/licentiaat”. Graduate programmes are intended as an expansion and elaboration of the undergraduate cycle. The programmes usually offer a number of options and modules which can influence considerably the content of the study. First, it is possible to specialise in a “major” language. Second, it is possible to maintain the balance between the two languages. Third, it is possible to specialise in a thematic field such as “literature”, “linguistics” or “theatre”. Again, the number and nature of the special courses depend on the individual universities. At the end of the two graduate year cycle, students are expected to write a thesis. The language of this work depends on the subject but as a rule of thumb the works are written in the major target language studied.

The Flemish decrees on university education only vaguely specify the content of the studies under scrutiny here. No mention is made of the number of hours of literature, linguistics or language study proper. Depending on the university, an average of about 3 hours a week per language studied is provided. “Landeskunde” is included in this figure. As to the content of literature studies a considerable amount of freedom exists. In most universities the first two years are devoted to surveys and introductions while in the third and fourth year more specialised topics are dealt with. The same applies for linguistics. Language study proper aims at improving the students’ oral and written proficiency in the target languages.

**Structure of the programmes.** All programmes focus on linguistics, literature and language proper. More general courses on philosophy and history, among others, complete the curriculum. The more practical-oriented language proficiency courses are often offered by the language centers of the universities.

In Belgium, language programmes last four years divided in two cycles of two years. The first two years are devoted to general and introductory courses while in the following years a relative high number of options are offered. As a consequence, it is difficult to make general statements about the final outcomes of the various programmes. The number of specialisations is such that a graduate in languages can be anything from a specialist on 18th century French literature to a cognitive linguist.

**Evaluation** is mainly achieved through oral examinations although for many language courses written examinations are organised as well. Students' language proficiency is typically assessed along the lines of listening comprehension, oral fluency, reading comprehension and written proficiency. Candidates who fail at the first examination may repeat at the second session.

There is a gradual evolution from a strict year-based system towards a credit-based system.

### **Postgraduate or third university degree**

The doctoral degree can only be obtained minimum two years after the “licencié/licentiaat” degree. The examination consists of the presentation of an original dissertation which has to be privately and publicly justified.

#### 2.1.2. Career prospects for graduates

In Belgium the career prospects of students of language seem at first sight rather limited but are in practice relatively wide. Limited prospects because it is commonly thought that the best prospects lie in the educational system, i.e. in the last three years of secondary school. From the 1980s onwards, careers in the school systems have stagnated while the number of language students has somewhat decreased. Relatively wide because in practice language students end up in a variety of contexts.

As far as opportunities in the school systems are concerned the following remarks have to be made. While it is true that the prospects in secondary schools have somewhat decreased new perspectives with respect to education have recently emerged, including adult and migrant education. Adult education organised by private and public organisations have opened new opportunities for language students. In cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Genk and Liège with a relatively high number of migrants, language students are often integrated in migrant education initiatives. Further career prospects include the spoken and written media, and a variety of private firms who require linguistically qualified personnel.

Overall, career prospects for language students in the educational system have been fair. Career prospects outside the field of education are far too good particularly in cities like Brussels, where there is a constant need for linguistically qualified employees.

### 2.1.3. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes

The strict division in university language degrees according to language families (Germanic, Romanic, Slavonic or Oriental) is being abandoned. In the future, it should be possible for students to take language degrees combining languages from the different families. The university curriculum has started to take into account the professional demands concerning practical language ability by introducing subjects like business communication and translation. For the main part, translation remains the province of institutes for translators and interpreters, which provide both theoretical and practical training in translation, while at university translation is usually approached from the theoretical point of view.

### 2.1.4. Examples of good practice

### 2.1.5. Reasons underlying these changes

### 2.1.6. Identification of needs

#### 2.1.6.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies

For a number of years now, a certain dissatisfaction with respect to some aspects of language programmes can be noted. First, despite the fact that three languages are spoken in Belgium, there is a feeling that not enough advantage is taken of this situation. This feeling of dissatisfaction goes beyond the universities and is shared by many primary and secondary school authorities. Second, university programmes have undergone quite a number of changes in recent years. There is a strong feeling now to return to basics and to get rid of more experimental approaches that may have been popular in the recent past.

In some institutions it is felt that curricula should be simple and focused on just a few specialities instead of focusing on a large number of options such as was favoured during the eighties.

In many departments across the country, there is dissatisfaction with the cuts that have been effected in the number of staff members. There is a general feeling of frustration because retiring members are not or inadequately replaced, which makes the remaining members' task more arduous.

Demographic changes strengthen this tendency: the number of students has been declining and there is no sign of a change in this respect.

An on-going debate is the linguistic schooling of the new students. Is it or is it not true that their foreign language proficiency decreases over time? There is conflicting evidence about this issue but there is a need for more collaboration with secondary schools in order to monitor this aspect more closely.

In Belgium, still more should be done in the field of exchange of foreign students. In Flanders, one of the problems is that Dutch is neither a popular language nor is it well-known that Dutch is spoken by nearly 60% of the population in Belgium (approx. 6m) and that there are a further 16m of Dutch speakers in the Netherlands, making Dutch the most important minor language in the EU. Exchanges with neighbouring countries are for that reason often imbalanced in that foreigners prefer to go to more popular countries. The Belgian students themselves should also be stimulated further to take advantage of the by now numerous opportunities.

There is a need for a uniform postgraduate system. A Ph.D. training programme should be worked out rapidly.

#### 2.1.6.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements

Until recently, most language students found work in the educational system. While this is still true for a number of them a large part ends up in other working environments. Syllabuses do not take into account this change. Most universities still train their students for scientific work and tend to ignore other prospects. In other words, there is a need to promote professionalization for language teachers. This is particularly necessary, since practical language teacher training at university level leaves much to be desired.

#### 2.1.7. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

##### 2.1.7.1. At first-degree level (graduate level)

Cf. 2.2.7.1.

##### 2.1.7.2. At postgraduate level

## **2.2. 'Alternative' programmes (Applied Language Studies, Cultural Studies, etc.)**

Alternative programmes were agreed to cover language degrees which did not take literary studies as a main focus, and degrees in which language-related studies were combined with studies in another discipline, in roughly equal proportions.

### 2.2.1. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes

At university level only three non-language programmes include a substantial number of language courses within the curriculum, although the actual number of hours a week and the languages offered may differ very much from university to university. The programmes in question are Economics, Commercial Engineering and Communication Sciences. As far as content and objectives of these programmes are concerned it is useful to distinguish between the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels universities. Yet, it cannot be said that in these programmes languages form an integrative part.

In Flanders, three languages are studied in the first two years of the curriculum: French, English and German. In the third and fourth year the language programmes are often reduced; in some cases one additional, optional language course can be chosen, such as Spanish, Italian, etc. The number of hours per course varies between 30 and 90 hours, i.e. one to three hours a week. It has to be noted that in many Flemish universities the number of foreign languages has been reduced in the past decades. This curtailment has been most pronounced in the Flemish law schools, where the number of hours for all languages but French was cut drastically. The situation is slightly different in Walloon universities. With respect to the study programmes mentioned above, English is compulsory in the first two years and sometimes also in later years. In addition, Dutch or German are on the curriculum as well. The number of hours varies between 30 and 90 a year per language. Sometimes another language can be chosen such as Spanish and/or Italian or any other language that is offered in the language institutions.

In Brussels, Dutch, French and English are usually compulsory and are taught for anything between 30 and 90 hours per course per year. Of particular interest in some Brussels universities is the possibility to follow courses in Dutch-speaking or French-speaking university respectively dealing with specialised subjects. This means that an Economy student enrolled in a Dutch-speaking university can follow a course on, for instance financial marketing, at a French-speaking university and vice-versa. This possibility depends, of course, on the proximity of the institutions and on their mutual agreement.

The main objective of these programmes is to enable the student to perform his/her profession adequately in a range of foreign languages. This is in line with the needs expressed by industry as is revealed by several studies (Verdoodt & Delbeke 1982-83; Vinikas 1986). At the same time other studies have revealed that most companies are dissatisfied with the language proficiency of their university graduates.

There is considerable variation between regions and universities in the structure and contents of the language programmes. In general, these programmes concentrate on material related to their specific study field. In this sense they are similar to courses of language for specific purposes. That is, English for economists will differ from English for law students.

Most language courses are offered during the first two years of the curriculum. In later years the language component is sometimes reduced. Evaluation usually takes the form of oral examinations though sometimes written examinations are organised as well. Assessment focuses on listening comprehension, oral proficiency, reading

comprehension and written proficiency. Candidates who fail at the first examination may repeat at a second session.

2.2.2. Career prospects for graduates

2.2.3. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes

2.2.4. Examples of good practice

2.2.5. Reasons underlying these changes

2.2.6. Identification of needs

2.2.6.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies

2.2.6.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements

2.2.7. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

2.2.7.1. At first-degree level (graduate level)

Universities should upgrade their language departments and their curricula for non-language students. In Belgium, language knowledge has long been taken for granted. But societal changes have created a completely different language climate. In the Dutch-speaking community, measures should be taken to upgrade French and German, while in the French-speaking community, the knowledge of Dutch should further be propagated. In both cases these measures should not be limited to universities but should also include primary and secondary schools.

The previous measures should go hand in hand with a more open attitude towards the language laws; in cases where early language learning is hampered by law, measures should be taken to reinterpret or eventually change the law. Regional authorities in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium should get rid of the fear for Frenchification which – by now – has become totally unwarranted.

In the French-speaking part measures should be taken to propagate Dutch as the second language. These measures should suffice to create an open language attitude. By the time taken, the result would satisfy the demand of industry for a better knowledge of the second language, implying Dutch or French depending on the community.

2.2.7.2. At postgraduate level

## **PROGRAMMES FOR LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE RELATED PROFESSIONS**

### **3. Innovations in the training of language teachers**

#### **3.1. Language teaching and learning in primary and secondary school education**

#### **3.2. Initial training**

'Initial training' was agreed to mean the training received before entering full-time service as a teacher at primary or secondary level.

##### **3.2.1. Institutions responsible for training**

Teacher training is part of higher education. Three levels can be distinguished: (1) teacher training at the universities, (2) teacher training in one cycle term higher education and (3) teacher training in higher pedagogical education for "social promotion". The latter will not be discussed because training programmes for language teachers do not exist at this level.

*Teacher training at university level.* During the third and fourth years of the regular curriculum, students can follow teacher training courses. It is also possible to follow these courses after an academic degree has been obtained. The pedagogical diploma provides access to teaching positions in the three final years of secondary school. All full-fledged universities provide teacher training facilities.

*Teacher training in one cycle higher education.* These teacher training colleges can be attended after the completion of secondary education. These programmes train infant teachers, primary school teachers and teachers for the first three years of secondary education. It is only in the latter case that training is provided for language teaching specifically. The departments of higher pedagogical education (the former "écoles normales/normaalscholen") are completely independent from universities. Both the Catholic as well as the state-run networks have teacher training colleges. The French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking authorities are currently conducting a long-term research project aimed at a complete reform of teacher training programmes.

##### **3.2.2. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes**

Language teacher training at university level. Teacher training curricula at university level consists of two components. First, a theoretical component focusing on pedagogical and didactic issues and problems; second, practical teacher training. The theoretical part includes the history of the science of teaching, methodology and experimental pedagogy with special reference to languages. Practical training includes training in classrooms under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

Teachers are qualified to give instruction in two languages according to the options in their degree courses.

The pedagogical programme is spread over two or three years when it is taken during the regular curriculum. When the pedagogical courses are followed after the degree has been obtained the pedagogical education lasts one or two years according to the preference of the student teacher. The examination includes theoretical and practical exams: two lessons have to be given in a real classroom situation. During the study, but varying from university to university, a number of papers to be written by the student are required. The number of practical hours varies from university to university but does not exceed 60 hours a year.

Language teacher training in one cycle higher education. This type of teacher training takes three years and provides both general language education as well as pedagogical training. The latter gains in importance as the study proceeds. Qualifications are not limited to languages proper as languages have to be combined with other subjects. The organisation of the training is as follows. Students opt for a main subject which means they have a choice between Dutch, French, English or mathematics. In addition, they choose one subject among, on the one hand, history, geography, physics and biology and, on the other hand, geography, humanistic studies, German, biology, economy, physics and chemistry. This implies a wide variety of combinations. It is possible to opt for Dutch and English or Dutch and French, for instance. It should be noted that this programme has undergone quite a few changes in the past decades and that previously other combinations were possible. In addition to the previous subjects pedagogy is a compulsory subject. The degree allows the holder to teach three subjects in the first three years of secondary education, i.e. lower secondary education.

The programmes are spread over three years. The first year consists of general courses and specialised subjects, such as languages, as well as introductory courses in pedagogy. In the second year, about as much time is devoted to pedagogy as to the rest of the subjects, while in the third year, about half of the time is devoted to teaching proper together with a practical training in various schools under the guidance of an experienced teacher and the trainers of the training institute. Examinations include theoretical as well as practical components. In most institutes, a final project is required which usually consists of an extensive paper on a didactically oriented subject.

3.2.3. Career prospects for graduates

3.2.4. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes

3.2.5. Examples of good practice

3.2.6. Reasons underlying these changes

3.2.7. Identification of needs

3.2.7.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies

Initial language teacher training at the universities is in need of many things. It should be intensified, it should be more specialised and a much more practical training component should be added. Furthermore, there is in most cases a need for courses on applied language study. In short, there is a need for a complete change for

teacher training at the university level. As has been mentioned before, the ministries are studying a number of proposals in this respect.

#### 3.2.7.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements

The previous paragraph suggests that for this aspect, needs are both various and numerous. The changes in society and the changes in the educational system as well as in the student population have not been incorporated in the professional training for language teachers. The amount of training and the practical experience after obtaining the teacher training degree is far too limited to enter professional life. In-service training cannot make up for this. OESO (1991) called for the need to develop some kind of team spirit and the need to rethink the current situation.

#### 3.2.8. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

##### 3.2.8.1. At first-degree level

One of the important measures to be taken by the institutions consists of programme evaluation. While it is generally agreed that programmes have to be reformed, institutions should make an effort to monitor initial teacher training more closely. With respect to in-service training, most universities organise specific training for specific subjects. However, much more consultation between the school authorities and the institutions should take place. In-service programmes should follow a general policy instead of depending on independent initiatives by different institutions.

The regional authorities should reform initial teacher training at the higher pedagogical institutions. Collaboration with universities should be part of this reform. It is felt by all parties involved that this should be done urgently and that politicians should commit themselves to this. At the moment various propositions are under study.

##### 3.2.8.2. At postgraduate level

### **3.3. Training of teachers of a second language**

This section can potentially cover a number of situations, most of which appeared to be relevant to a limited number of countries. It was therefore agreed to delete this section, and to deal with those situations as either initial or continuing (in-service) training.

#### 3.3.1. Institutions responsible for training

In the Dutch-speaking community there are three kinds of centers co-ordinating in-service training. In fact, each network has its own in-service training centre. The "Pedagogical Centres" organise in-service training for the Catholic network and local

pedagogical centres organise training in cases where local school authorities are in charge, mostly in the cities of Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent. In addition, universities organise in-service training sessions by mutual agreement with school inspectors. Material help is provided by the ministry, such as informing teachers and schools, refunding travel expenses, insurance, etc. Some 300 million Belgian francs is made available annually for in-service training, of which 70% goes to the Catholic network. After the erection of the “Autonome Raad voor het Gemeenschapsonderwijs” (ARGO) (Autonomous Board for State-run schools) in 1989, the number of in-service training programmes has increased considerably.

In the French-speaking community, in-service training is provided by the ministry and coordinated by the department called “Organisation des Etudes” (Service for study organisation). This service co-ordinates all activities for state-run schools and provides financial aid to all networks. In addition to this and upon the recommendation of the Council of Europe special centres for in-service training were founded in Frameries, Charleroi and Huy (OESO 1991). Distinct from this, the Catholic network provides additional in-service training as well. Furthermore, a decree stipulates that 0,12% of the annual education budget is to be used for in-service training.

### 3.3.2. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes

With respect to language training, two kinds of in-service training can be distinguished, namely short-term and long-term training. Short-term training refers to individual sessions, usually one day, where teachers are introduced to new techniques and/or methodologies and/or where assessments are made of previously discussed material and/or methodologies. Long-term training refers to more extended activities such as attending particular training sessions over a period of time. The content of the various programmes is diverse and varied because it is not structured by any authority. Ideally, these programmes should introduce the teachers to new techniques and methods as well as provide an assessment of them. In the Dutch-speaking community, it is felt that, in general, there are too many programmes covering too many subjects. In the French-speaking community some priorities have been put forward. Only those priorities dealing with language are mentioned here. Starting with the primary schools, priority is given to (1) in-service programmes dealing with learning a second language according to the principles of communicative teaching and (2) to intercultural education and its implications. The content of the in-service training programmes dealing with language and organised by universities are equally diverse. In recent years, communicative language teaching has been the focus of attention but new ways of teaching literature and the status of grammar in foreign language education to name a few areas have equally enjoyed attention.

Structure of programmes. As has been said earlier there are one cycle and two cycle programmes. One cycle programmes last one day and generally take the form of a workshop or study day. Two cycle programmes can last a whole year or – in some cases – cover a number of years. A special kind of two cycle programme involves teachers who are temporarily relieved from classroom duties in order to follow special programmes in the home country or abroad. After their training has been completed it is their task to train their colleagues. Another kind of programme involves

collaboration with Lingua. In this case teachers spend some time in a foreign institute or foreign teachers are brought in to train local teachers.

- 3.3.3. Career prospects for graduates
- 3.3.4. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes
- 3.3.5. Examples of good practice
- 3.3.6. Reasons underlying these changes
- 3.3.7. Identification of needs

3.3.7.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies

In-service training is in need of reform. There is too much for too many and it needs to be better co-ordinated. Especially in Flanders, the need is felt to limit the programmes and to just focus on much more limited options which will be closely monitored by the authorities.

3.3.7.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements

Cf. 3.2.7.2.

3.3.8. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

- 3.3.8.1. At first-degree level
- 3.3.8.2. At postgraduate level

### 3.4. Continuing education

This section deals with continuing teacher education (in-service) provided by institutions of higher education.

Cf. 3.3.

- 3.4.1. Institutions responsible for training
- 3.4.2. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes
- 3.4.3. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes
- 3.4.4. Examples of good practice
- 3.4.5. Reasons underlying these changes
- 3.4.6. Identification of needs
  - 3.4.6.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies
  - 3.4.6.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements
- 3.4.7. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

## 4. Innovations in the training of translators and interpreters

### 4.1. Description and analysis of the current spectrum of professional activities

The Belgian labour market offers opportunities to translators qualified in economic, legal, scientific, and technical translation. The market is very limited for literary translation.

For conference interpreters Brussels offers many opportunities: apart from permanent or free-lance employment at the European institutions or NATO HQ, conference interpreters are also in demand on the open market.

Courts and social services are other employers of translators and interpreters, they usually offer occasional employment. Compared to the English-speaking world, Belgium has lagged behind in providing an appropriate training for these specialists. The situation is about to be remedied. (cf 4.6).

Cf. National Report on Translating and Interpreting in Belgium, produced as part of TNP1 in languages ([www.fu-berlin.de/elc/TNPproducts/SP7NatReps.doc](http://www.fu-berlin.de/elc/TNPproducts/SP7NatReps.doc))

### 4.2. Institutions responsible for training

In Belgium, there are nine institutions offering training for translators and interpreters.

- The Dutch-speaking institutions are:

**Erasmushogeschool**, Departement Toegepaste Taalkunde in Brussels,  
**Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst**, Departement Toegepaste Taalkunde (formerly Vlekho) in Brussels,  
**Hogeschool Antwerpen**, Departement Vertalers en Tolken in Antwerp,  
**Lessius Hogeschool**, Departement Vertalers-Tolken (formerly KVH: Katholieke Vlaamse Hogeschool) in Antwerp,  
**Mercator Hogeschool**, Departement Vertaalkunde in Ghent and

- Four are located in the French-speaking community:

**Ecole d'Interprètes Internationaux (EII)**, now part of the Université de Mons-Hainaut,  
**Institut Libre Marie Haps**, now part of the Haute Ecole Léonard de Vinci, in Brussels,  
**Institut Supérieur de Traducteurs et Interprètes** de la Communauté Française de Belgique (ISTI) in Brussels,  
**Institut Supérieur de Traduction et Interprétation – Cooremans**, now part of the Haute Ecole Francisco Ferrer in Brussels.

Six of these nine institutions belong to the CIUTI (Conférence des Directeurs des Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes): Hogeschool Antwerpen, Lessius Hogeschool, Mercator Hogeschool, Ecole d'Interprètes Internationaux, Institut Libre Marie Haps, Institut Supérieur de Traducteurs et Interprètes.

From a geographical point of view, five out of nine institutions are situated in Brussels, one in Wallonia and three in Flanders (two in Antwerp and one in Ghent).

As a rule, no entrance exam is required but there are some exceptions. In most cases foreign students whose mother-tongue is not Dutch or French are asked to pass a test. Twice each year the Mons department organises an entrance exam. Belgian French-speaking candidates have to orally summarise a text as well as pass grammar and stylistic tests in the mother-tongue (cf. CEDIEP 1993; CSBO 1993) Belgian law does not allow institutions of translators and interpreters to set entrance exams on the basis of which candidates can be refused.

### 4.3. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes

#### 4.3.1. At first-degree level

The content of the programmes is relatively similar for all departments. Over the last few years, differences have been increasing because the recent decrees on higher education no longer lay down a fixed curriculum. Departments have been granted autonomy in this matter and can now draw up their own curriculum to reflect the requirements laid down in the professional and training 'profiles' drawn up by specialist committees and approved by the Ministry of Education. In the near future, the departments will be subjected to external assessment on the basis of these profiles.

The translator training is basic and it is only in the last two years and more and more in a fifth year that specific training for interpreters is offered. In principle, translation and interpreting takes place into the mother-tongue. In smaller language communities like Flanders translation into the foreign language is also in demand.

All departments distinguish between different kinds of languages. First, the basic language, usually the mother-tongue; second, languages where quite a bit of prior knowledge is required, i.e. French/Dutch (depending on the community), English and German; third, languages where no prior knowledge is required, i.e. Danish, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish; fourth, optional languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Polish, Turkish, etc. However, the number of languages offered as well as the languages themselves differ from institute to institute. Students have to study two languages apart from the mother-tongue. Mother-tongue courses include phonetics, grammar, lexicology, discourse analysis, etc. as well as courses on translation. Foreign language study includes the language proper, "Landeskunde", terminology and translation exercises. The courses are complemented by courses on economy, history, law, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Structure of programmes. For the training of translators and interpreters at least two cycles of two years have to be completed. A distinction is made between the training for becoming a translator and the training for becoming an interpreter. As has been

said the translator's training is considered basic. From the third year onwards, and especially in the fourth year, specific courses and practical exercises on interpreting are offered. Since the latter training is considered difficult, there are relatively few students who opt for the interpreter's training. Most of them first complete the translator's training and then specialise by taking an additional year to become interpreters.

Oral and written exams are used to evaluate the students. Most institutions favour also "permanent evaluation" for the foreign languages, i.e. evaluation on a regular basis, each month for instance. At the end of the fourth year, a thesis has to be submitted usually related to a translation or interpreter's problem.

Belgium used to have a strict system in which students were assessed per year by means of final examinations. A credit-based system is gradually gaining ground.

Similarly, students have been able to choose at least part of their courses in recent years.

4.3.2. At postgraduate level

4.3.3. At the level of continuing education

#### **4.4. Career prospects for graduates**

Career prospects outside the areas of translating and interpreting are diverse and numerous. The following is an overview of some of the possibilities: international commerce, public service, P.R., the media and all sorts of communication services, tourism and international organisations.

#### **4.5. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes**

4.5.1. At first-degree level

The final year of the translator's degree is increasingly individualized as a consequence of the credit-system and the introduction of optional courses and modules. Cf. 4.3.1.

4.5.2. At postgraduate level

4.5.3. At the level of continuing education

#### **4.6. Examples of good practice**

The European Grotius project has resulted in two pilot-projects for the training of court interpreters. The Flemish project is a joint project between the Lessius Hogeschool and the Antwerp Law Court, and consists of a 10-week course providing basic training in court interpreting. Candidates are required to pass a language test.

4.7. Reasons underlying these changes

#### 4.8. Identification of needs

##### 4.8.1. At first-degree level

Problematic is the persistent difficulty of recruiting and retaining well-qualified staff to teach courses of academic level of conference interpreting.

##### 4.8.2. At postgraduate level

Finding qualified teaching staff continues to be a problem. By law, it is obligatory for teachers in university-level higher education to obtain a PhD. However, institutes for translators and interpreters cannot grant PhDs. The teaching staff has to be recruited among university educated PhDs, who have a different (linguistic or literary) background, or such translators who have been able to obtain a PhD after first getting a second degree in linguistics or literature at university. For interpreting, there is the added difficulty that wages in education cannot hope to compete with the wages offered by the open market or the European institutions.

##### 4.8.3. At the level of continuing education

Ways should be identified of establishing more in-service courses on a permanent footing, instead of relying too much on ad hoc arrangements as at present.

#### 4.9. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

##### 4.9.1. At first-degree level

##### 4.9.2. At postgraduate level

##### 4.9.3. At the level of continuing education

There is a need to provide in-service training for experienced professionals on a more planned basis.

### **PROVISION FOR STUDENTS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES**

#### **5. Innovations in language provision for students of other disciplines**

##### **5.1. Language studies integrated into non-language programmes**

This section includes degrees where a language component is integrated into the programme as a compulsory element. These degrees are normally focused on

another subject (e.g. law, engineering, business) but include requirement to study a language as a minor, supporting element (often around one quarter of the degree). They may also include a period of residence abroad.

#### 5.1.1. Content, objectives, and structures of programmes

Apart from the fields of Economy, Commercial Engineering, and Communication Sciences, which have been dealt with in 2.2.1., the following fields carry language programmes and/or

Archaeology, Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Civil Engineering, Psychology, Law

and Pedagogy. This is not an exhaustive list because in theory most faculties provide for at least one language in their curriculum.

The content of these courses is related to the discipline. Attention is mostly paid to oral and reading proficiency. In some cases courses for written scientific English are provided. Three languages are opted for most frequently: French or Dutch (depending on the community), English and German, Spanish and Italian follow.

Structure of the courses. These courses are loosely structured. Most of the time they are organised by the language departments of the universities. The number of hours varies between 30 to 60 per year.

#### 5.1.2. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes

#### 5.1.3. Examples of good practice

#### 5.1.4. Reasons underlying these changes

#### 5.1.5. Identification of needs

5.1.5.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies

5.1.5.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements

#### 5.1.6. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

5.1.6.1. At first-degree level

5.1.6.2. At postgraduate level

### 5.2. **General and subject-oriented language courses accompanying non-language programmes**

#### 5.2.1 Content, objectives, and structures of programmes

On special demand, language centres organise subject-oriented courses. In Belgium, language courses for civil engineers, doctors, pharmacists and a wide range of other occupations exist. Often, the objective is to brush up a language or to get better acquainted with a language that turned out to be of more importance than expected. Nearly all language centres are equipped with facilities such as language laboratories and computer techniques. This allows for self-tuition. It is not uncommon to find students in the centres trying to master one of the so-called less taught languages in Europe.

Structure of the courses. There is a great deal of variation here, ranging from classic courses in oral proficiency or reading comprehension to courses with a substantial proportion of self-tuition.

5.2.2. Recent changes in content, objectives, and/or structure of programmes

5.2.3. Examples of good practice

5.2.4. Reasons underlying these changes

5.2.5. Identification of needs

5.2.5.1. Seen in relation to the development of language studies

5.2.5.2. Seen in relation to non-academic requirements

5.2.6. Measures to be taken at institutional, regional, national, and European level to meet the needs identified

5.2.6.1. At first-degree level

5.2.6.2. At postgraduate level

### **5.3. Language provision and support for mobile students**

5.3.1. For incoming students

5.3.2. For outgoing students

### **5.4. Non-language programmes or parts of programmes taught through one or several other languages**

5.4.1. Disciplines involved

5.4.2. Levels at which (parts of) programmes are taught

5.4.3. Languages used

5.4.4. Target groups (mobile students, home students et cetera)

5.4.5. Policies and objectives underlying the practice described

5.4.6. New measures proposed

## **CONTINUING EDUCATION**

### **6. Innovations in language studies in continuing education (excluding language specialists)**

**6.1. Target groups**

**6.2. Content, objectives and structures of programmes and courses**

**6.3. Recent developments**

**6.4. Identification of new needs**

**6.5. Measures proposed to meet the needs identified**

## References

---

The foregoing is to a large extent based on the report by P. Van de Craen (VUB) (1999). Warm thanks to the following for providing valuable information: I. Lanslots (Lessius Hogeschool), P. Pauwels (Lessius Hogeschool), R. Sinjan (Lessius Hogeschool), S. Vanvolsem (KUL).

---

CSOB. 1993. *Hoger Onderwijs in Vlaanderen*. Brussel: Centrum voor studie- en beroepsoriëntering en psycho-medisch-sociale centra.

CEDIEP. 1993. *Le guide des études supérieures*. Bruxelles: Centre de documentation et d'information sur les études et les professions.

Van de Craen, P. 1999. *Language Studies in higher education in Belgium*, SIGMA Scientific Committee on Languages.

Van de Craen, P. & R. Soetaert. 199?. *Language teacher training and bilingual education in Belgium*.

---

---