

The Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad – Vlor)

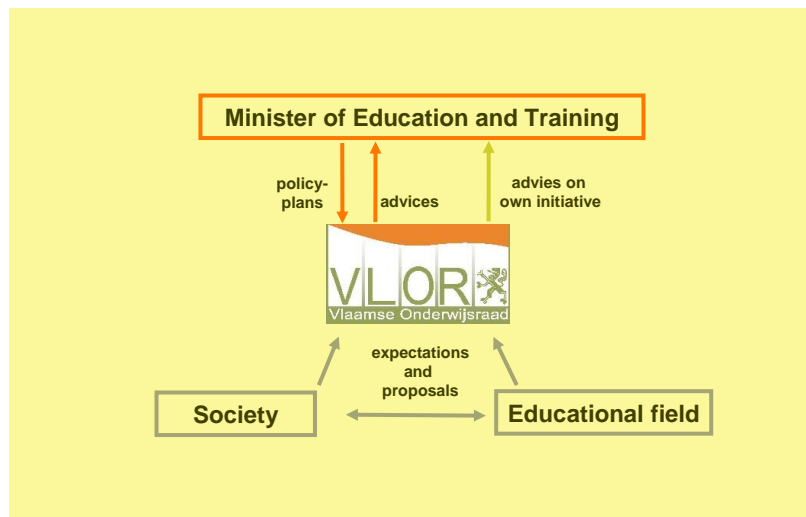
Improved policy making through consultation

The Vlor is the “strategic advisory council” for the education and training policy of the Flemish Community. It plays a role in the policymaking process.

1 The tasks of the Vlor

1.1 Advice

The Vlor is first of all an advisory body. It gives advice on request of the Minister of Education and Training of the Flemish Parliament and it can give advice on its own initiative. In both cases it translates the expectations and suggestions of society and the educational field into recommendations for the government. The English summary of some important recommendations can be found on this English part of the site.



Recommendations on request

The Flemish Minister of Education and Training has to ask the advice of the council on the yearly policy plan and every draft act (projects of decree). Without this advice no act can pass parliament. The minister must also ask the advice on important implementation issues. The yearly bill of the education budget is the only exception.

The Vlor evaluates the propositions of the minister to see if they are desirable, achievable and acceptable for the educational partners. The Vlor investigates the consequences of a proposal for the pupils, students, for schools and for the society. It evaluates also if the proposal will contribute to quality education.

Recommendations on own initiative

The council also brings out recommendations on its own initiative. It then reflects on the outlines of certain educational policies, or draws attention to themes it thinks will become important in the near future or to themes in other policy domains that influence education and training. By way of this proactive counselling the Vlor actively contributes to the education policy making process.

E.g. already in 1998 the Vlor started the debate on the integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream education. Every year he proposes subjects for scientific research.

Other examples:

Recommendation on the implementation of the European education policy (October 2005)

Recommendation on the admission and guidance policy in secondary education (February 2006)

1.2 Consultation

The second task of the Vlor is to organize consultation between different educational and social partners. In commissions and working groups they can meet to make arrangements for the organization and development of education and training.

They can, for instance, make practical arrangements for the implementation of new educational initiatives of the government. A good example of such a project is the equal opportunities policy in education. The educational advisory services meet to co-ordinate this new policy, discuss practical problems and supervise the training program for the educational advisers in the field. The Vlor organizes information sessions for schools and coaches the supervisors involved.

An other example of this 'consultation' are sectoral commissions where representatives of the economic and educational field meet to discuss the correspondence between curricula for vocational training and the needs of the labour market. They also contribute to recommendations that deal with professional/job-related aspects of vocational training, or the recognition of certificates by the economic sector. They follow the regulations of so called 'regulated professions'.

1.3 Study

The council functions as a knowledge centre for education. In support of its consultation task and to deliver well-founded recommendations, the Vlor uses the results of national and international studies and reports (by UNESCO, OECD, ...) and invites experts to share their insights.

The council can also organize 'problem explorations'. It explores new educational developments or problems with the collaboration of experts with an academic or practical background. The aim is investigating the ins and outs of a theme without the immediate intention of giving advice.

The Vlor regularly organizes seminars and its documentation centre can be consulted by everyone who shows interest and makes an appointment.

2 Structure

The Vlor is composed of a General Council and a council for each of the four levels of education: primary, secondary, higher and lifelong learning.



The General Council discusses all educational issues with an impact on the whole education system or on more than one level. It also co-ordinates the activities of the four other councils.

These level councils have competence and autonomy for their education level. All stakeholders in the field of education and training are represented in the Vlor.

The Vlor also counts a considerable number of commissions which deal with specific themes or educational forms: special education, vocational training, education in arts, consultation between inspection and educational advisory services, equal opportunities, economic sectors, ... Commissions operate under the authority of the General Council or one of the level councils. All the councils can also create temporary working groups to discuss a specific theme or prepare an activity. The results of this work can be brought out as a recommendation.

In total, about 1100 people are member of one of the councils, commissions or working groups or participate in projects. This means a considerable amount of education people in the field are involved in the Vlor, and in consequence participate in de education policy making process.

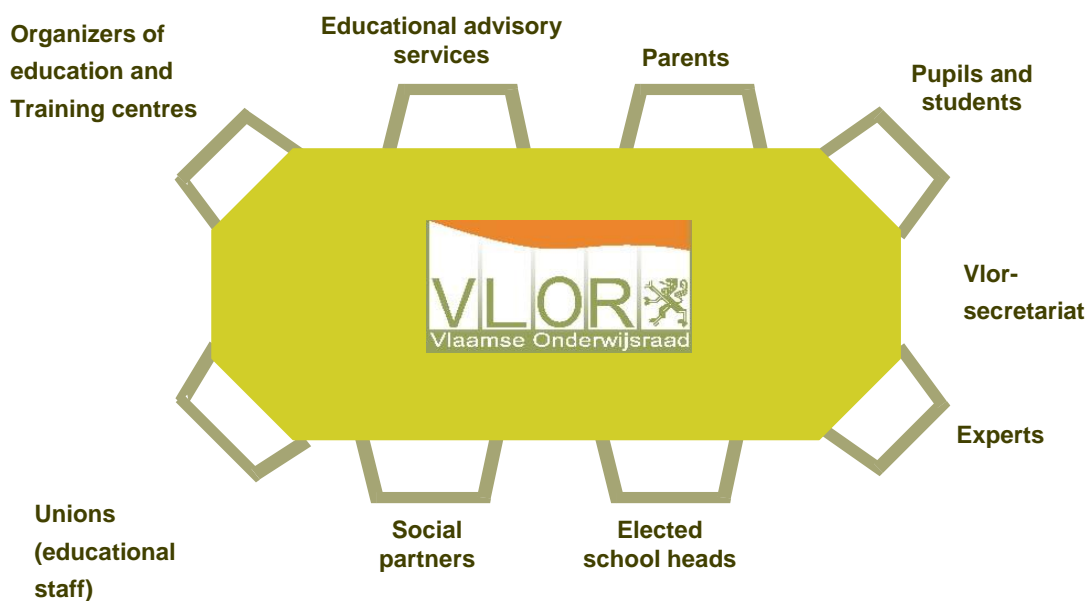
3 Composition

Representatives of all partners in education meet in the Vlor:

- representative authorities of the organizers of education
- training centres

- educational advisory services
- teachers and other educative staff via the unions
- parents
- pupils and students
- social partners
- experts
- elected school heads

This broad representation of the educational field is a characteristic feature of the Flemish Education Council. In each recommendation the council strives for consensus so that all partners have their share in a balanced recommendation.



4 **Autonomy**

The council has a working budget which it can administer autonomously and it appoints the staff of the secretariat. The council operates independently from the Department of Education and Training and from the Minister.

The chairmen of the level councils are elected among their members for a period of four years. All members of the councils are nominated by the Minister of Education and Training on the recommendation of the organizations they represent in the councils.

The General Council elects its chairman among external candidates.

5 The secretariat of the Vlor

The secretariat supports the functioning of the education council both practically and with regard to the content of its output. The secretariat has a staff of about 35 employees.

Logistics

The secretariat organizes the meetings of the different councils, commissions, working groups, etc. It puts meeting rooms at the disposal of the members, takes care of the administration, organizes the activities, co-ordinates the projects and takes care of the correspondence and the communication of the Vlor.

Conceptual

The secretariat also contributes to the content of the recommendations, projects, activities and publications of the Vlor. The staff members follow the current events and the results of educational research. They prepare the meetings and write the drafts of recommendations and other documents which form the basis for discussion in the councils, commissions or working groups. They participate in discussions and formulate the conclusions in the final recommendation. The secretariat also keeps an eye on the timing of all the activities.

The Vlor also takes care of the secretariat of EUNEC, the European Network of Education Councils (www.eunec.eu).

6 Services

The Flemish Education Council offers a number of different services to the broader educational field.

Publications

The Vlor publishes recommendations with a long term significance (e.g. Inclusive education), job profiles and the related training profiles, brochures (e.g. Art education, Quality indicators for global education), the result of problem explorations, manuals on new teaching strategies (e.g. on self-regulated learning with examples of good practice) or new insights (e.g. on pupils counselling and guidance for secondary education).

Information Sessions and Seminars

The council regularly organizes information sessions on specific subjects.

The seminars are usually related to an important recommendation or a publication. Workshops with examples of good practice often are part of these activities.