

PASCAL Report to the Region of Flanders

PURE Work 2009-2010

A. Formal and informal means of engagement

What has happened during two years with PURE, and what should happen now?
 What regional priorities can be assisted by engaging with the PURE clusters?

PURE has certainly had an impact on those HEI's that took part in the benchmark enquiries "*Benchmarking the regional contribution of universities*". This benchmarking exercise was really a major strategic element in the PURE action plan and has been valued by many stakeholders.

In Flanders, counting 22 Universities of applied science and 5 universities, it was obvious to set up the benchmarking with an on-line instrument. The benchmarking tool as provided by PASCAL Observatory was for that reason transformed into an on-line-questionnaire .

The benchmarking exercise was well prepared and got the support of the ministry of education. In each of the 22 Flemish UAS and 5 Universities a link person was appointed and he had the task to organise a meeting, lasting half a day, in which at least 5 staff members from different levels within the organisation + one of the HEI-leaders and a student should participate. During that meeting the on-line questionnaire was answered in a consensus with all participants. At last, after having been on-line accessible during almost three months, 14 out of the 26 HEI's answered the questionnaire, or 55%. In following scheme a simple summary of the overall results are shown:

Indicator groups	Mean ratings	Lowest ratings	Highest ratings
Enhancing regional infrastructure	47,16%	18,80	32,16
Human capital development processes	60,75 %	07,80	24,00
Business development processes	33,75 %	32,75	28,75
Interactive learning and social capital development processes	47,12 %	13,75	35,37
Community development processes	32,62 %	29,75	30,75
Cultural development	32,00 %	49,60	10,16
Promoting sustainability	27,42 %	40,85	27,42
Promoting engagement	41,33 %	13,83	43,83

Within the highest ratings, the strongest score is given to the work of promoting engagement (43,83%) and the weakest to Cultural development (10,16%). In the mean ratings however the highest ranking is given to human development processes (60,75%). Overall, the lowest ratings went to promoting sustainability. In fact, these are intriguing findings that will be worked out in detail in the final report on Flanders.

With each question in the on-line enquiry, the HEI's were asked to prove their high rated answers were evidence based by giving a description of a good or best practice as worked out in their institution.

This exercise brought together the vast array of disparate information about third mission activities organised within the Flemish institutions. For the first time, a report was made on these activities and most HEI actors involved concluded that they were pleasantly surprised by seeing how many third mission activities already exist....The booklet containing the good practices was disseminated within a lot of organisations and opened new insights on possible cooperation.

An important one-day conference was held in the city of Genk where the results of the benchmarking exercise were presented and third mission activities were discussed in working groups. Prof. James Powell was keynote-speaker. He illustrated the very important third mission activities of the University of Salford and introduced the ideas behind the project "Universities for a Modern Renaissance – Engaging and Empowering Local Business and the Community". At least 3 HEI's were so charmed by his ideas that Prof. Powell has been invited to work with them.

At least those who answered the questionnaire and were present at the conference have recognised the necessity of making the ad hoc collaboration with the surrounding community into a structural one.

The conclusion of the second review, that took place in April 2010, were confirmed: most stakeholders concluded that the Flemish HEI's should seek to embed third mission activities in their teaching and research activities. This would require that the HEIs should reformulate the third mission as an integral dimension of their mainstream activities. That would in effect replace the still dominantly ad hoc approach to third mission activities which nowadays results in the lack of visibility of the many activities already organized. The stakeholders made arguments for a region-wide adoption of the benchmarking tool as a bi-annual exercise for all HEI's.

The interviews also revealed that within the third mission, the business stakeholders asked decidedly to equip students and post-graduates with the competences required for sustainable employment certainly within the challenge of constructing a leading-edge economy in Flanders. In that respect a general awareness was revealed of a significant gap between initial training and professional life and the necessity to fill in the post-initial needs of those in work for continuous updating of their knowledge, skills and attitudes. The growing demand was expressed for professionals to be better prepared for and be able to work in a global business environment. Different stakeholders argued hereby that the language regulations in Flemish HEI's constitute a major obstacle for internationalisation.

In the second half of 2010 the regional stakeholder benchmarking took also place to measure the position of the region? Seven organisations have answered, amongst them 3 Flemish companies, 2 non-profit organisations, and 2 regional government authorities.

This is a simple summary of the overall results. A detailed investigation of the answers will follow.

Indicator Groups	Mean ratings	Lowest ratings	Highest ratings
Understanding the region	32,16 %	19,33 %	45,83 %
Framework Conditions	42,37	10,12	47,12
Human capital development	40 %	16 %	48 %
Business development processes	20%	18,18 %	61,81 %
Interactive learning and social capital	28%	16 %	56 %
Cultural development	20 %	0 %	80 %
Sustainability	45,71 %	8,57 %	45,71 %

The strongest ratings were given to business development processes active in the region and to the position of culture and cultural development.

B. Benefits and prospective future gains from international networking via PURE, including benchmarking to monitor and enhance progress

The HEI and regional benchmarking tools are a valuable way of taking stock and, from a basis of knowledge, of monitoring and enhancing progress in getting value from the region-HEI partnership.

Within the collaborative PURE network we recognize several ways of helping the region to develop better by exchanging experience. We would advise, in particular.

- To work on a recurrent system of life long learning opening-up better opportunities for individuals already at work to make a continuous updating of their knowledge possible;
- To have visionary debates and reflection within the HEI's on the way the HEI's mission statement, including always the so called "service to society", can be realised together with the regional authorities, businesses and companies;
- To select and disseminate a selection of the thanks to the PURE benchmarking tool gathered "good practices" within the region and to share them with the other PURE regions to make them also internationally accessible;

- To set up structural consultation with employers in order to construct realistic curricula which avoid the still existing gap between initial training and professional life;
- To make practical placements and internships available for every student by working structurally together with business and industry and especially with SME's. Internships abroad should be systematically organized and supported by the Flemish HEI's, they are still too spasmodic nowadays. Structural international collaboration within the PURE-framework will help.

C. How the region can get more value from engagement with its higher education institutions; and how the higher education institutions can get more value from engagement with the region

Each partner manages its own affairs and orders its own business. To engage effectively each must calculate what arrangements hinder and what best assist fruitful engagement. In the case of Flanders we advise the following:

for the region: Flanders should no longer view life long learning as an "added-on" for specific target groups, but has to integrate LLL in the educational system as a whole by regarding it as a policy discourse that informs educational policy in the direction of recurring cycles of learning, working and the active social participation for all citizens.

for the higher education institutions: better and duly structured links to the world of business must be worked out. HEIs need to be more proactive in this respect and liaise more actively with firms, especially with SME's. The liaison officers of the Chambers of Commerce should be accepted as the perfect intermediaries between these two worlds.

D. Evidence that the work of PURE will be sustained in the future

The work of many projects disappears after the end of the formal contract. In the case of Flanders, there is evidence that PURE has stimulated sustainable linkages, and we advise the following strategies for continued development that even might include a joint action plan for 2011-2013.

For the region: to stay in contact with the PASCAL-PURE-network: this can be done by the Flemish Ministry of Education, by SERV the Socio-economic Council for Flanders, by VLEVA the Flemish-European Liaison Agency and/or by VOKA the Flemish Umbrella Organisation for Employers, but also FLAMENCO might again be interested in working out a new action plan.

For the HEIs: Some of the Flemish HEIs do work hard on their third mission and see regional engagement as a strong responsibility. They possibly will/can be the torchbearers handing on the torch of PURE. This will become clear by the end of 2010.

E. The profile and context of the region – its distinctive and unique features

Flanders, being the northern part of Belgium, is a small region, less than 14.000 km² but with 6 million inhabitants, and, at the same time, Europe's most densely populated area. Demographically speaking the population is aging dramatically and the population pyramid shows that almost 35% of the inhabitants are over 50 now, this has serious consequences for social security, health insurance and pension systems.

At the same time, Flanders remains a region in which people stop working between 55 and 60. The consequences of this have long been ignored by politicians and knowledge centres. It is clear that many more people should stay at work after 50 and stay working till 65.... More possibilities for Life Long Learning offered by the HEI's are therefore necessary. It is clear that economic growth and technical innovation suffer by lack of LLL and not using enough the 50+ workforce.

With in the near future one third of the population older than 60, serious difficulties will show up by the middle of the 21st century. Who will sustain permanent (technological) innovations that are necessary for economic prosperity? The huge elderly population will then hardly compete with young Americans or Chinese in their 20th in high-tech research or engineering?

Luckily there is a significant net migration into the country. This will slow down the process of population aging, but immigrants, almost 10% by now of the population, are not well integrated.

Universities and university colleges are not adequately aware of these problems and are continue to provide higher education to young students being 18 to 24 year old, and only few of them have an immigration background. Too less is done to make HEI's better accessible to immigrants.

A long-standing characteristic remains the ever existing discord at national Belgian level between the French-speaking community of Wallonia and the Dutch-speaking community of Flanders. After extraordinary remarkable elections in June 2010 won by a right flemish party in the north (Flanders) and by the socialist party in the south (Wallonia) complex negotiations to form a Belgian federal government started and were stopped after 120 days. Totally new negotiations are to be expected. This indeed constitutional impasse can be regarded as a threat to the Belgian state and its economy.

Public debt is now almost 100% of GDP and unpopular measures will be necessary to restore the fiscal balance.

But it must be said, the Flemish Government has ambitious plans to make Flanders by 2020 to one of the five most dynamic regional knowledge economies in the EU and to a learning society!

In the report of the second review this conclusion evokes an answer to these challenges: 'From the viewpoint of "spatial development" and the impact of HEIs in the region, the key conclusion is that the Flanders region has in the future seriously to reflect on the interactions between HEIs and the region as political, economic, social and cultural spaces. HEIs operate in these distinctive societal spaces, and this raises the question as to how teaching and research, relate to these spaces. As such, the teaching and research functions of HEIs, also in terms of their mutual synergy, are interrelated with and impact upon their local, regional and global environments. How HEIs manage these interactions is the key empirical question which needs to be researched and understood.'

Jan Geens, VLHORA&FLAMENCO

Barry J. Hake, EUROLEARN