

# CLIL IN FLANDERS

*For a very long time the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium remained one of the few CLIL-less wastelands in Europe<sup>1</sup>. In 2014 it officially joined the CLIL-community, after a small-scale trial period lasting seven years. The process was slowed down by hesitation in policymakers and politicians, who were anxious not to let standards of the language of instruction go down a supposed CLIL-created slope. For now, we could say that the future looks a lot brighter.*

*This paper aims to describe the prehistory and early history of CLIL, the plurilingual innovation that has now been implemented in about sixty secondary schools, with another twenty starting in September 2017. The process was characterized by great enthusiasm and dedication in pioneering schools, who accumulated experience and are growing to full CLIL-competence, some in French, even more in English, just a few in German. CLIL in Flanders may be both typical and atypical, but readers may recognize some of their own experiences and might be inspired by what this part of the Low countries has gone through...*

Our contribution will consist of an outline of the educational system, including the state of foreign language teaching, a sketch of how CLIL was prepared and introduced and a present “state of diversity” rather than uniformity in 2016. We shall conclude this article by venturing into a prognosis.

## 1. The educational system

Belgium is a small country (30,000 sq km, pop. 11 million) with a complicated history and an equally complicated federal structure. Political and linguistic processes have resulted in a federal state, with the Flemish, French-speaking and the German-speaking communities, each with its autonomous education system. This study focuses on Flanders (13,500 sq km - pop. 6.5 million), the Northern part of the country, where Dutch<sup>2</sup> is spoken and used as the LoI<sup>3</sup> in schools.

A brief history of CLIL does not require an exhaustive description of the Flemish educational system<sup>4</sup>. A brief outline of linguistic, curricular and organisational characteristics that are relevant to CLIL’s development should enable readers to understand the context in which CLIL is gaining its footing.

### 1.1. Organisation

Whereas the Flemish government finances all schools that meet its conditions<sup>5</sup>, freedom of education and of organizing education is set in the Belgian constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> In e.g. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at school in Europe. Country Report – Belgium Flemish community (2004)

<sup>2</sup> Whereas we shall discuss the *Flemish* educational system, the language used in schools is Dutch. Referring to Flemish as a language would imply reference to dialects or a semi-standard variant of Dutch, colloquially called ‘allotment Flemish’.

<sup>3</sup> LoI = Language of Instruction

<sup>4</sup> Schools in bilingual Brussels belong to the system of the school’s language (French or Dutch).

For a regularly updated overview of the Flemish Community’s educational system, see the Eurydice website’s description <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-Flemish-Community:Overview>.

Schools are organised through three educational networks:

a. Education organised by the Flemish Community. The constitution prescribes a duty of neutrality for this network, called *GO! Education of the Flemish community*.

b. Education organised by municipalities or provinces.

c. Privately organized schools, the majority of which are of the catholic denomination. Apart from these, there are a small number of schools with a specific pedagogic or other philosophically or pedagogically inspired mission (Steiner, Montessori, Jewish...)

In 2015-2016, there were 2240 primary schools with a total of 422,911 pupils and 939 secondary schools, totalling 418,221 pupils<sup>6</sup>.

## 1.2. Structure

As educational systems usually go, the structure of Flemish education is quite complicated. The simplified outline is meant to help understand the context into which CLIL is set<sup>7</sup>.

Primary education starts at the age of six<sup>8</sup> (compulsory education = 6 to 18) . Secondary education is for youngsters between the ages of 12 and 18. As CLIL is currently allowed in secondary schools only, this overview will focus on the secondary level, with three stages of two grades each.

In the first stage of secondary education a common curriculum is taught. Pupils make a choice of study for a type of education only at the start of the second stage, although some degree of streaming takes place, guiding pupils towards one of the four types:

- *General secondary education (gse) – algemeen secundair onderwijs*: focuses on broad general education. It does not prepare pupils for a specific profession, but aims at laying a foundation for higher education.
- In *technical secondary education (tse) technisch secundair Onderwijs* pays particular attention to general and technical-theoretical subjects. After tse, a youngster may enter a profession or move on to higher education. This type of education also involves the development of practical skills.
- *Secondary education in the arts (ase) - kunstsecundair Onderwijs* combines a broad general education with an active practice of the arts (music, drama, dance or plastic arts). After secondary education in the arts a youngster may practice a profession or take up higher education courses.
- *Vocational secondary education (vse) beroepssecundair Onderwijs* is a practically-oriented type of education in which the youngster receives general education but where the focus primarily lies on learning a profession. Its aim is to allow pupils to enter the job market after school.

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<sup>5</sup> Only a very small number of schools are not subsidized by the government.

<sup>6</sup> These figures do not include special needs schools.

<sup>7</sup> Readers who are tempted to get acquainted with the intricacies of the system might find pleasure in consulting the overview at [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-Flemish-Community:Overview#Compulsory\\_education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-Flemish-Community:Overview#Compulsory_education)

<sup>8</sup> Almost all children attend pre-school from the age of 2.5. As many as 97.5% of 30-month-olds attend school at least 150 half days a year. Non-attendance of pre-school by children with low SES is considered a cause of problems in later school careers.

At the age of eighteen, pupils who have successfully finished any of the first three types will be given the certificate of secondary education<sup>9</sup>.

## Schematic structure of the national education system

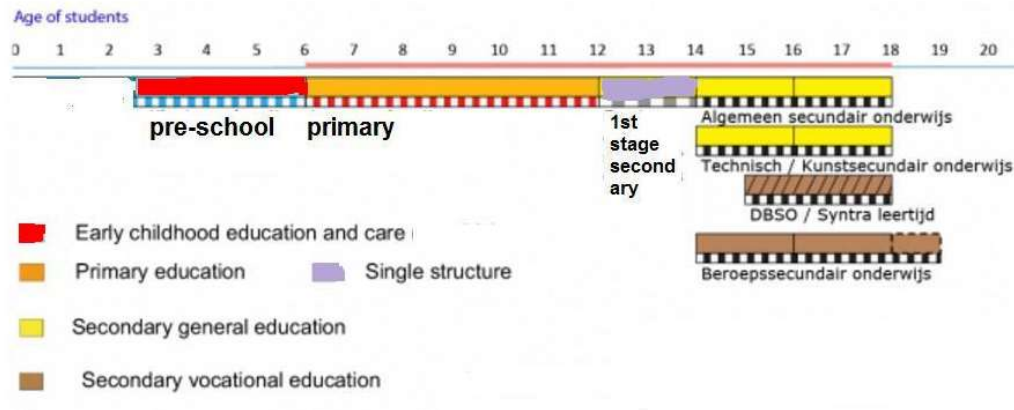


Fig. 1 adapted from Eurydice 1

### 1.3. Curriculum

The Belgian constitution guarantees the right for school organisers (governing boards) to decide on the curriculum they will teach in their schools. They need to attain, however, a set of 'final objectives', officially called *attainment targets* set by the government to guarantee a basic education for all and objectives that are set specifically for the type or branch of study. Teaching methods and assessment are the school's autonomy. The Flemish government assures the schools' quality by full inspection visits (at least every ten years) by a team of inspectors.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.4. Foreign language instruction

Dutch being the LoI and Belgium being a country with three official languages, Flanders has a long-standing tradition of second and third language teaching. Formal teaching of French as a second language is allowed from year three in primary school onwards, although most schools outside Brussels do not take up French in their formal curriculum until year five. In secondary education, English is added from grade one for pupils who are preparing for general (gse), technical (tse) or artistic (ase) education. From stage four or five, schools in gse and commercial or economic tse-sections add German or Spanish (sometimes both) as a third foreign language. Vse pupils are expected to finish their secondary training with A1-A2 in either French or English.

<sup>9</sup> Youngsters in vocational education will need to complete an extra stage to obtain the certificate of secondary education.

<sup>10</sup> For further reading on the curriculum subject *United in diversity: a complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders* (OECD, 2016)

As in many other countries, the transition from language teaching as “presentation, practice and production” to communicative, task-based FLT has been rather slow. Feuds about this falsely polarised discussion “knowledge vs skills” have somewhat faded, but pop up regularly.

The European Survey on Language Competences<sup>11</sup> (ESLC), showed that Flemish 14-year-olds were very good (3<sup>rd</sup> of 14 countries) for English, average for French (it should be noted that Flemish pupils in the survey whose French skills were tested were two years younger than their peers in other countries). Broadly speaking, a workforce mastering several languages has proved to be an asset for the Flemish economy. In recent decades, French skills have suffered through the omnipresence of English in youngsters’ surroundings, whereas French has virtually disappeared from their everyday world.

Due to the large number of non-native users of the Lol, especially in cities, authorities and practitioners have expressed great concern about pupils’ Dutch language skills. Despite academic pleas and research and a few quite successful experiments, some policy makers mistakenly thought that introducing multilingualism might harm the quality of Dutch for too many pupils. Besides, the nationalist tendency among some political decision makers has generated considerable resistance against the introduction of more foreign language teaching, e.g. against the introduction of CLIL.

## 2. CLIL’s Prehistory

### 2.1. A defiant pioneer instigates a pilot scheme<sup>12</sup>

Until 2007, any survey of CLIL in Europe showed Flanders as a blank area, whereas the French-speaking community in Belgium had already taken up *immersion linguistique* in 1998 in primary and secondary education. Flemish legislation did not allow any exceptions to the 1963 law stipulating that all teaching except foreign languages in Flemish schools must be in Dutch.

In September 2005 however, one secondary school, the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Instituut of Poperinge defied the law. They introduced ICT and economic lessons in French in the first stage (13-14 year-olds). Lieven Delvoeye, the head teacher, was inspired by EMILE in French-speaking Belgium and was urged to improve pupils’ French by the proximity of French-speaking economic and social contexts. The school is only a few kilometres away from the linguistic border and France and a large number of graduates find work in French-speaking companies or need to communicate in French in their daily lives.

As Frank Vandenbroucke, the then minister of education, and his administration were sympathetic towards the project and through support by the Catholic schools’ umbrella organisation, the school got away with this apparent subversion and in 2006, the minister announced a project allowing ten Flemish secondary schools temporary deviation from the linguistic law in order to experiment CLIL.

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<sup>11</sup> ESCL (2012) [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/language-survey-final-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/language-survey-final-report_en.pdf) compares the results of first and second foreign language teaching in 14 educational systems. The rather tentative character of this study still reveals a fairly high level of achievement of Flemish FLT.

<sup>12</sup> A small-scale e-CLIL pilot for French was set up in 2012 by Prof Piet Van de Craen (Free University of Brussels), in co-operating with Austria, Bulgaria, Spain, Turkey. See European CLIL Resource Centre for Web 2.0. Education Mini-Pilot & Main Pilot . [http://e-clil.uws.ac.uk/images/docs/Main\\_pilot\\_report\\_Belgium.pdf](http://e-clil.uws.ac.uk/images/docs/Main_pilot_report_Belgium.pdf)

This pilot was one of ten themes of the minister's ambitious plan to improve language education "De lat hoog voor talen in iedere school" (Raising the bar for languages in every school).

The pilot scheme's terms were quite restrictive:

- CLIL-languages French or English - English only allowed in the third stage;
- A maximum of 4 hours a week (15% of teaching time);
- No general basic subjects allowed in the experiment;
- A parallel course in Dutch must be provided;
- Due to their large number of French speaking pupils, Flemish schools in the Brussels area were not allowed to apply.

Each participating school was to receive three quarters of a full time teaching job subsidy for three years and 14,000 Euros to cover expenses for logistics and professionalization. A steering committee was to monitor the project and an expert panel was to evaluate the process and outcomes. Process support, monitoring and evaluation was provided by a team of Catholic University Leuven.

Only nine schools applied, partly due to the short period in which to prepare an application, but mainly because of the uncertainties involving a pilot scheme: continuity, pressure on pupils and teaching teams, workload and a general lack of familiarity with CLIL. All applicants were admitted to the project, bringing a variety of subjects and pupil profiles into the experiment:

- Two schools covered gse, tse and vse classes;
- Three schools were exclusively gse (one of which had a few commercial technical classes);
- One school covered gse, tse and vse, with vse and tse in the commercial training section;
- One school was vse and tse with commercial, fashion, welfare and chemistry sections;
- Two schools had their main activities in catering and hospitality, one of which also organized tourism (all vse and tse).

As far as pupils' ages and target language was concerned, four out of nine schools started CLIL in the first and second stages, opting for French, five schools chose English in the third stage. Subjects taught represented a variety of either theoretical or practical subjects: geography, sciences, body care, art history, Latin, kitchen technology, economic subjects, First Aid, statistics, sports... CLIL lessons were either optional extensions of the regular curriculum, or the subject was part of the specific curriculum.

The pilot started with an introductory/preparatory term in September 2007 and CLIL-classes were set up from January 2008. During the pilot, one school discontinued the experiment for several reasons: top-down introduction of the project and a supposed incompatibility of CLIL with the school's population.

Due to budget cuts, financing the pilot was not continued after 2010. Yet schools were allowed to continue their projects, awaiting a decree that would enable CLIL to be organized within a regular legal framework.

The wide variety of subjects, school contexts and pupils' ages was partly seen as an asset for the monitoring team as it enabled them to observe CLIL in a large number of forms. On the other hand, there was hardly any possibility to compare the effectiveness of different approaches.

The scope of this article does not enable us to go into more details of the pilot's history and outcomes. They are lengthily described in the reports of the Louvain scientific team<sup>13</sup> and the evaluation panel<sup>14</sup>.

All observations and analyses led to a set of recommendations for the government, urging an introduction of CLIL into Flemish secondary schools in a wider context than the pilot scheme provided:

- a less restrictive scope for the introduction of English as a CLIL-language;
- all subjects in the curriculum including basic subjects should be allowed;
- Brussels schools should not be excluded;
- a higher percentage of the curriculum than 15% must be allowed to increase effectiveness;
- prioritizing CLIL-training and support.

Some critics stated that the findings of the experiment were predictable through international experience and academic studies and that valuable time had been lost.

## **2.2. Politics taking over (2010-2014)**

Whereas pilot schools were allowed to continue their CLIL-activities, albeit without any financial support, wider implementation did not arrive until September 2014. Two pilot school teams were discouraged by the lack of resources coming from the government and abandoned their CLIL-scheme. Six schools continued, awaiting a definitive legal framework. Other schools were eager to start as well.

In spite of the enthusiasm in most of the pilot schools, evidence from international studies and a positive set of recommendations after the experiment, it took a long time before legislation was passed to allow CLIL officially in the Flemish secondary school system.

In 2011, the new education minister published an ambitious concept plan for language policy<sup>15</sup>, planning among others the introduction of CLIL with legislative work completed by 2012 and schools starting in 2014. Although most of the terms and conditions were already laid out in the policy note, and CLIL did finally start officially in September 2014, the political process was laborious and slow. This is due to several reasons that forced policymakers to "tread softly and carefully":

- Passing educational legislation in Flanders is a complicated process at the very best of times. Moreover, the government and all stakeholders had a lot of other urgent matters on their plates: preparing (c.q. opposing) a general reform of secondary education, the issue of inclusive

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<sup>13</sup> Strobbe, L. and Sercu, L. Wetenschappelijke begeleiding en evaluatie van de CLIL-projecten in het secundair onderwijs in Vlaanderen, Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2011

<sup>14</sup> The evaluation panel was directed by school inspectors and consisted of academic CLIL-experts, representatives of teachers' unions, the school umbrella organizations and the Ministry of Education. Both reports' findings were presented to an international panel of experts.

<sup>15</sup> Pascal Smet "Samen talengrenzen verleggen – tr. Moving language boundaries together" (July 2011)

education and the issues involving the integration of immigrants and asylum seekers, to mention a few.

- Language continues to be a politically sensitive issue. Two nationalist political parties, Vlaams Belang and NVA (the latter being part of the government coalition), were not keen on letting the Lol be “set aside” and “replaced” by English or any other foreign language. On the other hand, one opposition party (the liberal party - Open VLD) was very much in favour of multilingualism generally and CLIL specially, urging the government to go further than planned<sup>16</sup>. So, as a matter of fact, CLIL was sometimes caught in a polarized debate, which did not facilitate an easy progression through the warren of committees, negotiations and advisory councils.
- Workload for teachers being an important issue in CLIL, teachers’ unions were wary of widespread introduction into schools as no extra financing was going to be available.
- The government wanted CLIL to be used within a framework ensuring quality, arranging strict terms for the introduction of CLIL through a Decree. CLIL is described as a pedagogic method and pedagogic method is defined (according to the Belgian constitution) as being the school’s autonomy. Therefore, supporters of this pedagogic liberty opposed the strictness of the terms. On the other hand, abandoning the Lol, if only for a limited number of hours, is deemed a pretty far-reaching measure in Belgium’s context. The latter argument eventually outweighed the principle of pedagogic freedom.

Thus, in July 2013, the principle of CLIL was regulated by Decree and in December 2013, an executive decision by the Government stipulating the details was agreed, setting the terms for the introduction of CLIL as from September 2014.

### **3. CLIL Taking Shape - Breakthrough (2014)**

CLIL is a first class context to refer to using the CEFR levels. After its long and slow-moving prehistory, CLIL could finally enter the Breakthrough stage – A1 in CEFR terms. All obstacles being cleared, the legal framework was ready. Some of the essentials:

#### **3.1. Definition of CLIL**

The Decree defines CLIL in Flanders as follows:

*CLIL is a method in which French, English or German is used as the Language of Instruction to teach a non-language subject. CLIL can be used at all stages and in all types of secondary education<sup>17</sup>.*

Further explanations refer to the need to optimize the development of all target language skills and attitudes and the absolute priority of attaining the objectives of the non-language subjects. In several passages of the legislation, the need for CLIL to be part of an explicit policy to strengthen Dutch skills is stressed.

#### **3.2. Specific rules for aspiring CLIL schools**

- A maximum of 20% of non-language lessons (max 5 periods/week) can be taught in CLIL;

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<sup>16</sup> Open VLD members (liberal party) of parliament often referred to academic sources at the VUB, the Free university of Brussels, where a lot of research into CLIL’s effects was (and is) taking place.

<sup>17</sup> Including part-time secondary education. Not a single centre for “Learning and Working” has started a project so far.

- The school should develop an explicit policy to improve the level of Dutch for all pupils and have a coherent general vision and strategy for language development;
- Realizing the objectives of the non-language subject's learning plan is essential;
- The school must formally approve every individual pupil starting a CLIL project and pupils must commit themselves to remaining a full year in CLIL;
- Teachers need to certify their CEFR - C1 for all skills in the target language or have a Bachelor or Master's degree in that language AND be competent in the CLIL method;
- Pupils who do not take up CLIL must be able to choose for a parallel group, where the non-language subject is taught in Dutch;
- The school must clearly communicate all conditions of the CLIL-project to parents, esp. regarding commitment, assessment and the existence of a parallel group;
- Statutory rights of teaching staff must be respected: not accepting a CLIL-assignment for a teacher cannot be a cause of sanctions or change of assignment;
- The school must have planned a method of quality control, monitoring pupils' progress in the non-language subject, the CLIL-language and Dutch;
- The school's formal application must be submitted to and approved by the Ministry of Education.

No financial or extra staffing support is given to schools whose application has been approved. Nor do pedagogic guidance services receive any extra manpower to support the experiment. Though nothing is stated about this, parents should never be charged for the extra service or costs caused by the programme.

Following these conditions, it must be noted that there is no minimum quantity for any CLIL curriculum. Continuity is no requirement either: a school can decide to introduce CLIL in just one class for one hour a week, without providing a follow-up in ensuing grades or stages.

Schools can introduce CLIL for one, two or three languages, even combining two languages in one group. Didactic liberty and the school's policy (and possibilities) will define the shape, content and size of the project.

Apart from the stringent language C1 prerequisite for teachers, little is stated regarding didactic CLIL-skills and training.

### **3.3. The application procedure**

Schools that are CLIL-ambitious need to show that they are ready to take up the innovation challenge seriously by submitting an application about ten months<sup>18</sup> before the start in September. Permission is then granted or refused at the latest by May, depending on the extra information or clarification the committee wants. This application contains an elaborate set of questions, based on the Decree and conditions set by the Government:

- Description of the actual CLIL-project;
- An analysis of the school's and its pupils' linguistic profile, including SES;
- Description of the team's familiarity with the target language and CLIL-didactics;
- The school's vision and strategic objectives regarding CLIL;
- Communication plan vis-à-vis all stakeholders regarding all aspects of CLIL;

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<sup>18</sup> In 2014, different timing was allowed, due to late finalization of details.



- Plans for the actual CLIL-curriculum, didactics, assessment, reporting;
- Personnel management: professionalization, organization, evaluation, etc. ;
- Plan for logistical organization – impact on the school’s budget, material organization;
- Quality development and assurance: explain the system for process/quality management and improvement, measuring learning gains, stakeholders’ satisfaction.

Besides, the school must provide

- official proof of the C1-competence for CLIL-teachers;
- the minutes of the school council<sup>19</sup> and staff representatives’ meeting negotiating the school’s intention to start CLIL.

Thus, 25 schools promptly applied and were given the all clear to start their official CLIL-lives. Of nine pilot schools, four started in 2014, three were to apply at a later stage. Two other schools do not appear to have continued CLIL in any way.

The relatively low number of schools that applied was due to several reasons:

**Late start** Because of this lengthy preparatory legislative process, schools had been left in the dark for a rather long time before every detail was made clear. Thus, teams were not very confident about how to start and submit an application. Neither had there been a lot of opportunities for professionalization. The Education Ministry supported schools in preparing an application, mainly communicating about the innovation and assisting them, as did pedagogic guidance services of the umbrella organisations.

**No teaching materials available** As Flanders was only starting, there were no CLIL-language teaching materials adapted to the Flemish curriculum. As with the pilot schemes, teachers had to develop their own materials.

**High demands on teachers and school teams: C1 and workload** The compulsory official C1-certification was a threshold which many non-language teachers found hard to tackle<sup>20</sup>. A high proportion of projects was filled in by non-language teachers who also held a language qualification. The government did not invest any extra budgetary means. Schools either had to rely on teachers taking on the extra workload without any compensation or invest teaching hours of their usually tight budget.

**Lack of professionalization opportunities** As far as didactics were concerned, there was very little. The government did provide two in-service projects from September 2014 in which school teams could attend five half-day sessions<sup>21</sup>. A few teacher training colleges also set up training courses for aspiring and operating CLIL-teachers, and pedagogic advisors set up networks, there were contacts with immersion schools in the French Community and some schools used Comenius or Erasmus+ projects to learn from foreign experience.

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<sup>19</sup> Participative meeting with local stakeholders.

<sup>20</sup> Anecdotal, but significant: one of the 25 schools that had successfully submitted an application did not start because their CLIL-teacher in the hospitality section - with an extensive working experience of French – had failed the C1 writing test of the Alliance Française. This added to the discussion whether the C1 certification for all skills was not too much to ask for.

<sup>21</sup> This program lasted only one year. In 2015, the courses were abandoned owing to other priorities.

**Other priorities for schools** Education had a lot of tasks thrown upon them that were often deemed more pressing. Especially the new regulation on the inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools absorbed a lot of energy.

#### 4. First Steps – Waystage

##### 4.1. 2014-2015: 24 schools

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, 24 out of the 25 schools that had got the permission to start, actually started their CLIL-lessons. There was a some interest from national media and some of the starters managed to get a great deal of publicity in their catchment areas. It may be useful to give a brief outline of Flemish “CLILscape” at the start.

##### Language distribution in 2014-2015 (see fig.2)

Not surprisingly, there were hardly any German projects, as German is only the third foreign language taught in Flemish schools. The apparent balance between French and English requires some explanation: there is a majority of French CLIL in the first stage as pupils’ English skills are rather basic in the first two years of secondary school and a large number of French teachers in the lower stage combine French with a non-language subject, e.g. history, geography or religious studies. From the second stage onwards, there is a clear majority of English projects. In the third stage, French is almost invisible as subject teachers rarely combine a language subject with a non-language subject and as the French C1 certification appears to be a lot more difficult and laborious<sup>22</sup>.

Eight out of 25 schools had projects in two languages, 17 worked in one language (7 French, 10 English). A clear majority of projects is organized for pupils in general secondary education, foreign languages being more important in that curriculum. Tse projects were mostly oriented towards economic or secretarial subjects, although some purely practical subjects were also involved.

language			stage			type			
<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>general</i>	<i>technical</i>	<i>vocational</i>	<i>N/A</i> <sup>23</sup>
15	16	1	14	14	16	15	8	0	3

Fig. 2

##### Subject distribution (see fig. 3)

The list of “content subjects”<sup>24</sup> covers a wide range of the curriculum. As stated, the choice of subject is often determined by the availability of a (team of) enthusiastic teacher(s) who happen(s) to have the subject as well as language qualifications or are prepared to hone their language(-developing) skills.

<sup>22</sup> Certification - if not by a degree in the CLIL language - typically happens through the DALF test at the Alliance Française for French. For English, most teachers pass the APTIS test, presented by the British Council. Recently, teachers have found the way to adult education centres that provide a combination of CLIL didactics with language training and CEFR certification.

<sup>23</sup> As the First stage does not formally belong to any of the types, schools with projects in the first two grades only do not fit in any type.

<sup>24</sup> We have avoided this term as language teachers take issue with “content subject” being used next to “language subject”, falsely suggesting that formal language teaching is devoid of content. This apparent contrast is unintended.

geography	IT	Chemistry/ physics	history	Maths	Economic subjects	technical	Practical	PE	Religious studies	music
6	4	6	6	2	11 <sup>25</sup>	3		2	2	1

Fig. 3

### Size of projects

No comprehensive systematic survey was made of either the number of lessons per week nor the number of pupils taking part after the projects had got effectively under way. Thus, tentative numbers formulated in the application forms are the only data available.

These figures reveal a substantial number of very cautious, small-scale starts with either one subject, in one stage (7 schools) or one stage with two subjects, not necessarily in the same class. These schools either ventured into a one-shot project, where learning outcomes were going to be limited for lack of continuity or intended to extend their CLIL-team to assure a more effective project in future.

Three schools got to a potentially flying start with two or more subjects in each of the three stages, presenting a team of five or more teachers. More modest, but still promising, were the two schools with an onset of continuity, albeit with one subject only. Nine schools were working with CLIL in two stages, presenting one or two subjects.

Considering that time for preparation had been very short, that the field was relatively untrodden and conditions seemed forbiddingly strict, the start of CLIL in Flanders still appeared promising, but looked rather frail in places. Comments from the committee that had judged the applications were hopeful but showed that schools would need a lot of guidance and support if the start was to be successful and CLIL was to be consolidated.

The two teacher-training series subsidized by the government were fully subscribed, although not all participating schools took part.

#### 4.2. 2015-2016: 41 schools – 2016-2017: 61 (and counting)

Another 17 schools applied and were admitted to CLIL in 2015-2016. Quite remarkably, the Western regions, which had the largest number of starters, appeared to generate a tendency: more new schools applied for CLIL in this region than anywhere else. More often than not, there was some hint of competition for recruitment purposes.

September 2016 saw the start of twenty more schools, taking the total number up to 61<sup>26</sup>.

Tendencies of the starting year have been confirmed, as far as language distribution and the spread of projects among non-language subjects are concerned.

#### Language distribution (fig.4)

<sup>25</sup> The high number of CLIL in economic subjects can partly be explained by the fact that nearly all the schools' projects were economically or secretarially oriented.

<sup>26</sup> As some of the applications referred to a group of schools, the actual number will rather be 70.

Start	language			stage			type			
	English	French	German	1	2	3	general	technical	vocational	N/A <sup>27</sup>
2014	15	16	1	14	14	16	15	8	0	3
2015	16	9	2	10	8	12	14	3	0	2
2016	16	6	1	7	13	12	14	6	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

Fig. 4

English further established itself as the dominating language, partly due to the steady growth of English projects in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, where French is virtually absent. Small-scale projects in German are appearing.

In 2015, one school got started in its artistic section and among the 2017 applications, a number of very promising initiatives for CLIL in vocational classes appear to be in the pipeline.

#### Subject distribution (fig. 5)

Start	Geography	Nat. science	Biology	IT	Chemistry/physics	History	Maths	Economic subjects	technical	Practical	PE	Religious studies	Music/arts
2014	6	2	4	6	6	2	11 <sup>28</sup>	3	2	2	2	1	
2015	4	8	2	4	9	2	5	1	1	1	6		
2016	5	3	1	2	8	2	3	1	2	3	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>		

Fig. 5

History and the sciences are clearly the most popular subjects. The high number of economic initiatives reflects the interest taken by “commercial” schools teaching some of their secretarial and economic subjects in CLIL. In spite of the subject’s verbal nature and the limited skills of first stage pupils, history is widespread and appears to be delivering high quality, even in these lower years. CLIL-sciences is often chosen as a preparation for higher education, as Flemish universities mostly teach scientific subjects in English.

Not shown in table 5 are the large number of non-subject bound CLIL-programmes: seminar work, cross-subject projects, research skills, etc. These projects appear to be popular because of the more relaxed setting and their non-threatening nature as far as assessment is concerned.

The regional spread of CLIL-schools remains remarkable: the Western provinces (two out of five provinces plus Brussels) seem a lot more CLIL-minded (37 schools out of 60). No real explanation can be given except the presence of nearby positive practice and intensive pedagogic guidance. In some applications, a whiff of “doing what your (competitor) neighbour is doing successfully” can be noticed. No harm done or objections as long as quality is assured and competition leads to quality or better: co-operation.

<sup>27</sup> As the First stage does not formally belong to any of the types, schools with projects in the first two grades only do not fit in any type.

<sup>28</sup> The high number of CLIL in economic subjects can partly be explained by the fact that nearly all the schools’ projects were economically or secretarially oriented.

The Brussels and Antwerp inner city areas remain virtually CLIL-free. Two schools in the Brussels Capital area and one school in Antwerp got started, but these schools do not have a high proportion of pupils with low SES<sup>29</sup> characteristics, which a lot of inner city schools do have<sup>30</sup>. Efforts to cope with other needs caused by the specific nature of the population draw a lot of energy from teams, making other innovation more difficult to get started.

## 5. The future: Past the threshold towards CLIL-proficiency?

### 5.1. Quantity: the future looks bright

At the time of writing, another eighteen school have successfully submitted an application for a start on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, while five need to improve their application. 25 more schools already working in CLIL intend to extend their projects.

With eighty schools soon working in smaller or more extensive CLIL-projects, a few with a decade-long experience, others with a fifteen-strong CLIL-team and a continuity-span of six years for their pupils, Flanders has come some way towards being a full-blown CLILland. By 2020, an expected 10,000 pupils will have a CLIL-experience, however small or short. This promising picture can only be positive if quality can be developed, enhanced and maintained.

### 5.2. Quality: proficiency ahead?

One might try to analyse the present situation SWOTwise and see what this could mean for the future of Flemish CLIL. The survey of CLIL's early days by the inspectorate is due to be published soon and an academic research study of a sample of first-stage projects for French CLIL is due this summer. The Minister will hear recommendations based on these studies and may have to confront CLIL-directed criticism. Our analysis is based on "ab ovo" observations of schools and their implementation process, listening to heads and teachers and maintaining close contacts with all other stakeholders.

Several elements need to be taken into consideration. We shall discuss them randomly. Quite a few defining aspects appear to be double-sided. Strengths and weaknesses are to be closely linked via the same characteristic of Flemish CLIL.

**Strict (or vague?) regulation** The fact that there is a pretty strict set of rules for schools to be admitted to CLIL sometimes acts as an obstacle for potentially high-quality multilingual education. More than one enthusiastic team's plans were aborted because of "red tape fear". This is deplorable. On the other hand, these strict conditions pre-empt boundless proliferation that holds the risk of badly prepared initiatives that might harm educational quality for both language and content.

Despite this high formal threshold for entering, there is no prescription as to size or form of CLIL-practice. "Freedom of method" is an essential characteristic of Flemish educational culture and the practice of CLIL also varies widely. The principle that schools and teachers are allowed autonomy and freedom has rarely been abused, given the results Flemish education registers in international surveys.

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<sup>29</sup> SES = social economic status

<sup>30</sup> In 2015-16 there were 15 French-speaking secondary schools in Brussels with an "immersion" project, some of which have a high proportion of pupils with low SES characteristics.

We must hope that the freedom granted in the approach chosen for CLIL will be equally justified. Some proof will come from inspection visits controlling the attainment of curriculum objectives. As all literature and research on CLIL has shown, there is no clear-cut approach that could be called a panacea. It cannot be expected, nor is it desirable that one vision of CLIL should be imposed on any school system.

Still, some applications<sup>31</sup> revealed little more than basic awareness of the CLIL-process and did not document a great deal of didactic or theoretic preparation, if any. On the other hand, the efforts shown by most schools while the actual preparations got under way and when the project was running, make one feel confident about the future.<sup>32</sup>

**What actually happens after the application process has finished?** The most promising texts applying for a CLIL-start may fade into nothingness once the action must start. The school may be good at penning down a vision and targets, or have a nicely phrased and theoretically elaborated dream. But these schemes have to be realized once the permission has been granted. Lots of influences and circumstances in a school team can make a dream fail or come true. The tradition of schools and teachers dealing with their pedagogic freedom and the general atmosphere of work ethics in most teams must be a reason for careful optimism.

**Quality control** by schools. The success of a CLIL project (as of any innovation) should not solely depend on external control by the inspectorate, but on the school's power of quality monitoring and improvement: the competence to reflect, analyze, react, correct will be key elements in CLIL's success, locally and nationally. Early observations showed rather too sketchily developed plans for quality improvement, but awareness is growing. The matter of quality management has been and will need to be a priority for all pedagogic guidance services. As language policy in education will continue to be a sensitive issue for years, keen eyes will observe the evolution.

External quality control by teams of inspectors will naturally focus on the curriculum targets being achieved, on the school's complying with relevant rules and with a detailed check of processes operating in schools. CLIL will receive due attention, as it – as is the case with all innovation – needs to be evaluated.

**Red tape** One of the obstacles for starting schools is the administrative burden imposed upon them: a substantial effort is required to fill in the application form, with no compensation offered except the permission to start working. An enquiry among school heads who had successfully finished the procedure shows that a majority had grudgingly started the preparatory process, but that – in the end or with hindsight – they had actually found the process positive and useful, not just in view of CLIL, but as a general reflection on their organisation.

The political and linguistic situation being what it is, no great changes should be expected soon.

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<sup>31</sup> The committee advising the Ministry has observed that the quality of preparatory steps has increased remarkably in the four generations of applications so far. Professionalization and pedagogic guidance have created greater awareness

<sup>32</sup> In September 2016, the Catholic umbrella organisation held a conference to start non-subject CLIL-networks. All but two (very experienced) CLIL-schools registered a team. Other networks' initiatives were equally successful.

CLIL and the **equal opportunities** issue still have a very long way to go. In quite a few schools, CLIL is reserved for the stronger pupils. This is partly because of the rule stating “...sufficient knowledge and mastery of the language of instruction” as a condition for a pupil’s admission to CLIL . Secondly, schools and teachers sometimes fear that the content subject’s objectives might be more difficult to realize in the CLIL-language, especially with the less talented. Thus, CLIL is very often withheld from pupils who might doubly benefit from CLIL: gaining badly needed motivation for learning and developing. Disseminating good practice in this field might reverse this way of thinking.

**Personnel management – the human factor.** CLIL personnel management must be developed within the general statutory rights of teaching staff, which are quite rigorous. Very few schools have the means to offer compensation for the extra workload created by CLIL. Therefore, projects rely on the voluntary work of an individual or an enthusiastic team of teachers who would like to tackle the challenge for themselves and their pupils. In too big a number of schools, the team is rather small and problems have arisen when teachers are on sick leave for a length of time or take maternity leave. As CLIL develops and as recruitment of new staff takes CLIL-skills and willingness into consideration, the frailty of such projects may diminish and stability may grow.

New pressure on teachers from the planned reform of secondary education<sup>33</sup> and a revision of the “final objectives / attainment targets” might thwart other innovation, including CLIL.

**Team management** Good communication by school management or project co-ordination must see to the integration of CLIL into the school as a whole, avoiding the creation of an island within the school team. The crucial relationship between CLIL-teachers and formal language teachers is sometimes neglected or ignored, creating unnecessary misunderstandings. Five or six schools have reported that good CLIL practice and communication within the school has positively “contaminated” non-CLIL teaching, elements of CLIL-didactics and broader language awareness having spread across the school.

**Teacher training** Some colleges are setting up optional training units for their undergraduate students and as an in-service centre for teachers. A 24 study points postgraduate degree course was set up and is very successful. This dynamism is perfectly in line with the enthusiasm CLIL has generated in several individuals and teams. More initiatives and international contacts will widen the scope of professionalization and training.

**Teaching materials** As commercial publishers are not yet genuinely interested, there aren’t any CLIL course books or other teaching materials adapted to the Flemish curricula on the market. Flanders being a small market for publishing houses, this is unlikely to change soon. Hence, teachers need to develop CLIL-materials themselves, adding to the considerable – usually uncompensated – extra workload any new project generates.

To alleviate this pressure, networks have started informally and are being set up by pedagogic guidance services, where materials and other know-how will be shared. Given the correct mindset for professional exchange (“a lender AND a borrower be”), this should facilitate the development and exchange of good quality materials.

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<sup>33</sup> On January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Flemish government agreed on a structural reform of secondary education, due to start in 2018-2019, from the first stage onwards. The date for the implementation of revised Attainment targets still has to be decided. Political discussions on this matter are continuing.

**School competition** Schools submitting an application usually do so through a high dose of intrinsic motivation to innovate. In places, this drive has led to projects that have generated an increase in the recruitment of new pupils. It may be feared that the element of publicity could be the main incentive for rivaling schools to plan a CLIL-project. Extrinsic motivation rarely instigates quality. In this respect, the official procedure for application might be a welcome filter as well as an obstacle for rash adventures.

What about **CLIL in primary education**? Mrs Hilde Crevits, the present Education minister, has publicly supported the idea of multilingualism generally and CLIL specifically. Plans to allow CLIL from an earlier age may be prepared, but their realization might take another five years. A pilot scheme may come soon enough, but the practice may prove hard to implement. Primary schoolteachers whose mastery of a foreign language is up to CLIL-level may be hard to find. Concern for pupils' mastery of Dutch is serious.

Prejudice, generated by doubt about the level of the content subject may be more widespread than in secondary education and the mixed results of 'immersion' in the French Community might be another reason for scepticism.

## **6. Conclusions? The open road...**

Given the fact that Flanders is just living its earliest CLIL-days and so little reliable research is available, it is hard to assess the quality of CLIL as it is and impossible to say what the future could bring.

CLIL certainly should be here to stay, as it has generated a drive few innovations have seen, quite often from bottom up. The enthusiasm in many teams contrasts sharply with the reaction teams and individual teacher sometimes have when new tasks or methods are thrust upon them.

*This contribution to the conference of New Perspectives on CLIL, Bilingualism and Plurilingualism has humbly attempted to draw a picture of what has happened so far. Far from quoting Marc Antony's "mischief, thou art afoot, take thou what course thou wilt", in respect to CLIL, we conclude with Star Trek's Vulcan greeting "Live well and prosper".*

## **NOTES ON THE AUTHOR**

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