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Gender inequality, household formation and the transition from school to work

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One of the most fundamental values in Western societies is 'equality'. Together with freedom and solidarity, social equality belongs to the foundations of all constitutions in modern democracies. Equality as a modern value does not mean however that we do not tolerate inequality. On the contrary, we have an aversion to certain equalities. We don't want everybody to earn the same salary, to have a university degree, nor every football team to be the champion in the competition. In fact we have strict hierarchies in our society: income, status and power are not equally divided. However we consider these inequalities as equality, if they are 'merited'. Our ideal of an equal society is a meritocracy, in which inequalities are based on achievement. In this type of society, school by far is the most important institution for sorting out those who merit the best positions. Education is a long process of sorting. We expect everyone to enter school equally and to leave school with a certain degree, diploma, certificate, ... that determines further possibilities and chances on the labour market. School makes people unequal, but we call it equality if the sorting process is based on talent and achievement.

There is a long tradition in social sciences studying processes of status attainment and the effects of 'ascribed' characteristics. Research on social mobility traditionally has focused on the effects of social background or class of origin on the attained professional status. The role of gender, as an ascribed characteristic, has largely been neglected. Research into social mobility originally considered particularly the correlation between the position of fathers and of sons. The analysis of women was left aside because it was reasoned that the status of women mainly derives from the status of the husband (Acker, 2000). The assumptions that lead to the neglect of women in status theory and research are no longer accepted as valid. In particular the increased labour market participation of women has urged the inclusion of women in analysing social mobility (Korupp, 2000). Women not only took their place in the labour market, also in education girls have caught up with boys. In most Western countries there are as much girls in school than boys (Gallagher, 1997). Since cultural barriers and traditional role patterns no longer seem to impede girls in their school careers, there seems to be more attention for differences in the school performances of boys and girls. In this context the worse achievements of boys at school clearly came to the fore (Boaler, 1998). In Flanders the problematic character of boys' school careers is clearly visible in educational statistics and also a recent study on differential school achievement clearly illustrates the better performance of girls in education (Derks & Vermeersch, 2001, 2002). One would expect in a meritocracy that better performances at school do lead to better positions on the labour market. There are no indications however that women came up with men on the labour market. On the contrary, it is still uncommon to find women at the top of big companies (see Glorieux & Vandeweyer, 2002). In Belgium, only 20% of the executive staff in the 30.000

biggest companies of the country are female and only 5% of these companies have a woman at the top. The same picture at the universities were women are well represented at lower levels (46% of the assistants at Flemish¹ universities in 2000 were female), but women are very exceptional at the top positions (6% of the full professors in Flanders are women).

In this paper we focus on the discrepancy between the good performances of girls in school and their disfavoured position on the labour market. Using the SONAR-data we shed light on the transition from school to work, in order to find out why young women are not able to convert the advantage they have built up in education into a more favourable position in the labour market.

In 1999 the SONAR group (acronym for Study Group on the Transition from Education to the Labour Market) conducted a survey among an a-select sample of 3.000 Flemish 23-year olds (all born in 1976), which was designed to study in detail the transition from school to work. The questionnaires included an extensive registration of the educational and professional career of the respondents. This data collection was the first in a longitudinal project in which the 1976-cohort will be re-interviewed at the age of 26 (in 2002) and new cohorts will be started up. A new cohort, born in 1978 was already interviewed at the age of 23 in 2001. The Flemish Government funds the whole project in the context of the Program of Policy-oriented Research (further details: see SONAR, 2000a & 2000b).

The SONAR-data are very well suited to sketch school careers. In the first section of this paper we use these data, together with official statistics to compare the school performance of boys and girls. In section 2, we focus on the transition from school to work. The SONAR-data make very clear that women, despite their advantage in school achievement, even at the age of 23 already are confronted with some serious leeway's on the labour market. In section 3, we try to explain this discrepancy by looking at the process of household formation among young adults.

1 Girls take the lead in education

1.1 Girls overrun school

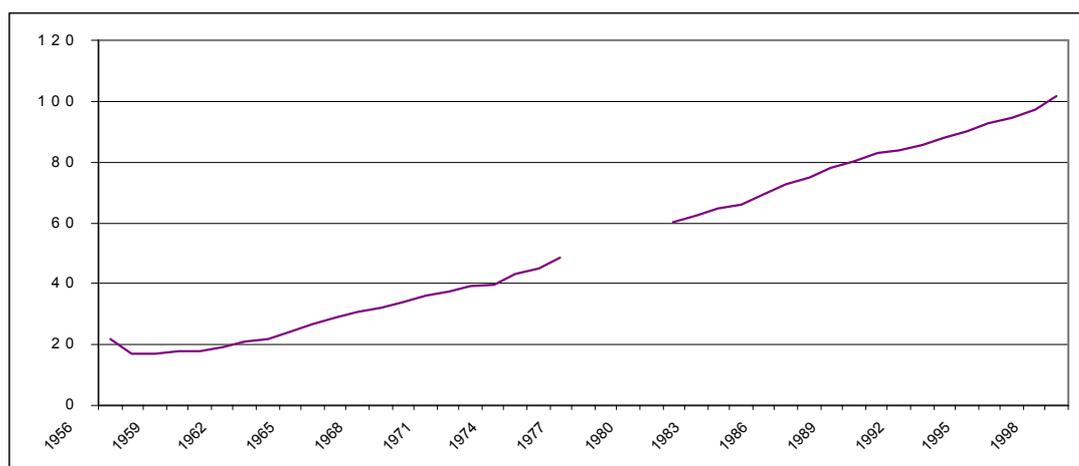
The last 50 years, girls in Flanders have gradually caught up on scolarisation rates (as proportions in full time education). Claes, Lambrecht & Schuttringer (1984) have analysed Flemish scolarisation rates for the period 1956-1983 (see also Derks & Vermeersch, 2001, 2002). For the age bracket 14-15, the differences between boys and girls never have been very big. In 1956 60,4% of the girls between 14 and 15 years went to school, against 63,4% of the boys. This small difference was gained up in 1969;

¹ Flanders is the part of Belgium where people speak Flemish. The inhabitants of Flanders are called Flemings.

about 90% of the boys and girls of this age group go to school at the end of the sixties. It takes until 1974 for girls from 16-17 years to make up arrears with boys. In that year the scolarisation rate of both sexes in this age group reaches 64,5%. The age group 18 to 21 years – the group eligible to enter higher education - has to wait until 1980 for equal scolarisation rates among both sexes. 34% of the boys and girls between 18 en 21 are still in education at that time. In the age bracket 22-23 years, even in 1982 there still is a substantial difference between boys and girls, the scolarisation rates are respectively 12,5% and 7,5%. Even in the 1999 SONAR-sample of 23-year olds, we find a lower scolarisation among girls. In this sample, 18% of the boys is still at school at the age of 23 as compared to 14% of the girls. This difference probably can be explained by the more successful school careers of women, and the bigger proportion of boys that falls into arrears during their school careers. Whereas most of the girls finish their higher studies ‘on time’ – i.e. 3 or 4 years after they started at the age of 18 and thus get their degree at the age of 21 or 22 – a bigger proportion of boys still has not finished school when they are 23 (see further).

The lower scolarisation ratio of girls at the age of 23 cannot be explained by lower participation in higher education. Recent figures clearly show that women have made up completely their relative arrears in higher education. In 1998, for the first time, there were more women studying at Flemish universities than men. In 1956 for each 100 male students, there were 21,7 female students at the universities, in 1998 we count 101,8 female students for 100 male students. Figure 1 shows that this process of overtaking followed a linear process.

FIGURE 1: EVOLUTION OF WOMEN STUDYING AT UNIVERSITIES IN FLANDERS: NUMBER OF WOMEN TO 100 MEN, (1956-1998)



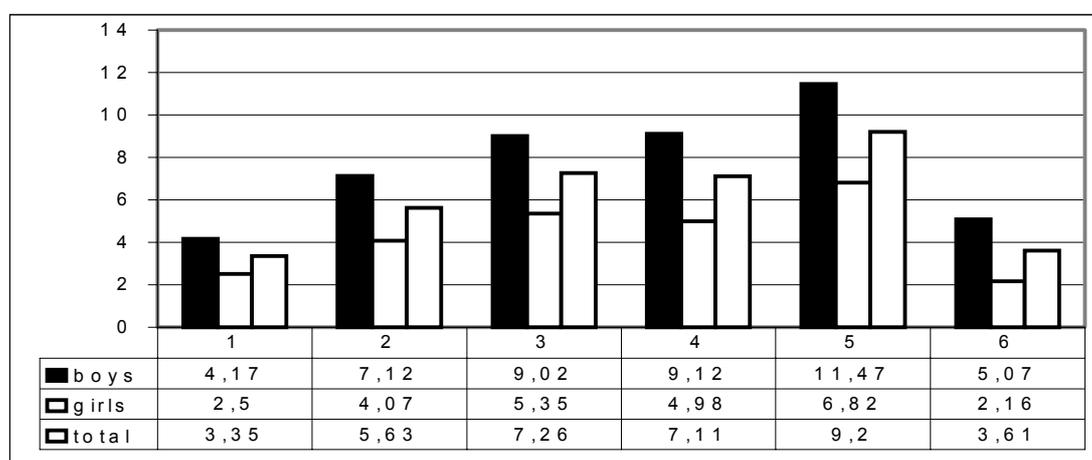
Source:(NIS, 1967; NIS, 1977) and data from the Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (Flemish Interuniversity Council, VL.I.R.). Data from 1977 until 1980 are not available. Calculations made by Derks & Vermeersch, 2001, 2002

Girls in Flanders not only participate as much as boys in formal education, there are also clear indications that they perform much better.

1.2 Girls perform better in school

A simple indicator for school success refers to repeating years. Pupils with insufficient achievements can be compelled to stay down a class. In Flanders repeating is not uncommon. 6,0% of all pupils in secondary education in 1996-97 had repeated the previous year. The differences between boys and girls in repeating are substantial: 7,7% of the boys were repeating that year as compared to 4,3% of the girls.

FIGURE 2: PROPORTION OF REPEATERS IN THE SIX YEARS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FLANDERS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS (SCHOOL YEAR 1996-97)

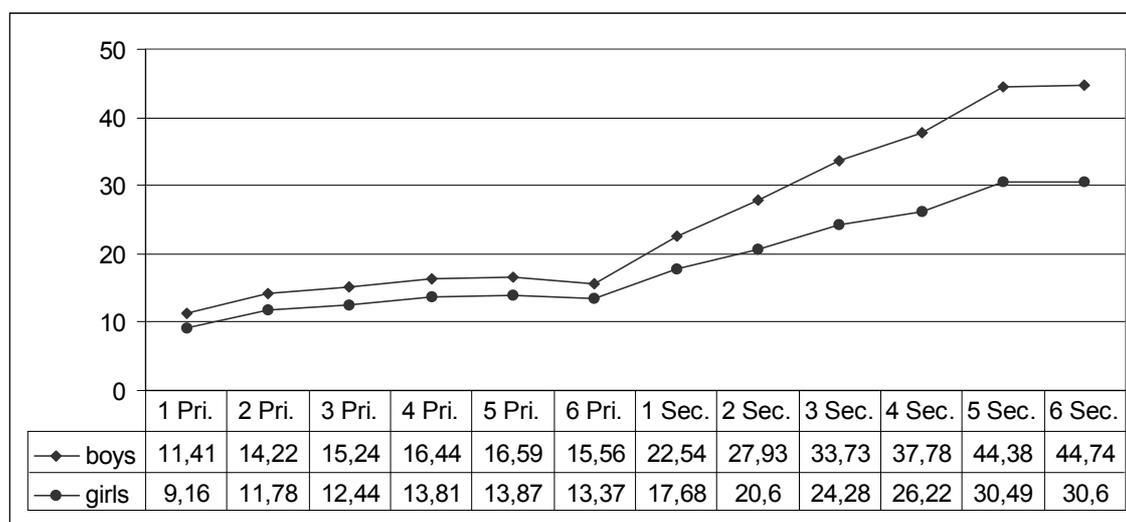


Source: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1998: p.11 – Adaptation: Derks & Vermeersch, 2001, 2002

In each year we clearly see a substantial higher proportion of males repeating the previous year (see figure 2).

If we consider the figures of repeating years cumulatively, we can get a global picture of pupils trailing behind during their school career. In primary education it is already clear that boys and girls start differently, boys already have arrears in their first year in primary school (see figure 3). In the further years of primary school the difference between boys and girls does not increase very much anymore. In secondary education however the gap between boys and girls increases every year. In the last year of secondary school about 30% of the girls show a lag in their school career, among the boys almost 45% trail behind. The gap remains quite stable after the 5th year, but this is probably because we underestimate the actual leeway because of drop out. It is well known that a number of pupils – again more males than females – quit secondary education unqualified.

FIGURE 3: PROPORTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE PUPILS LAGGING BEHIND IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR EACH YEAR (SCHOOL YEAR 1996-97)



Source: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1998, p.7 en p.17. Adaptation: Derks & Vermeersch, 2001, 2002.

The differentiation between sexes continues in higher education. In 1995-96, 58,6% of the women in the first year of higher education (outside universities) completed this first year successfully, among men this proportion is only 51,3%. Among those who started for the first time in the first year at Flemish universities in 1995-96, 48,8% of the women completed this first year successfully, as compared to 42,1% of the men (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1998).

1.3 More successful school careers for girls

The detailed information on school careers in the SONAR-data makes it possible to compare the different pathways boys and girls follow through secondary education. In order to do that, we first give a short introduction into the Flemish school system (for more details, see appendix 1).

In Flanders secondary education consists of three stages, each with a duration of two years. The first stage is considered to be an 'orientation'. In the first stage, two levels are discerned: A (general) or B (prevocational). From the second stage on, there are four different types or levels of education: **general secondary education** (with an emphasis on broad general education, which particularly provides a firm foundation for going into higher education); **technical secondary education** (with an emphasis on general and technical theoretical subjects, also including a lot of practical lessons); **secondary education in the arts** (a broad general education, combined with active art education) and **vocational secondary education** (a practical type of education in which young people learn a specific vocation).

Within the Flemish educational system there are a series of moments in which choices have to be made. Although not always formally, in practice certain choices exclude others (such as going from vocational to general education). Moreover, in secondary education in Flanders pupils get a 'certificate' each year, which also can limit the options left in the further educational career. There are three different possibilities. An 'A'-certificate means that the pupil has successfully completed its year and is allowed to continue the next year in the same educational type. A 'B'-certificate means that the pupil is allowed to go to the next year, not in the same type, but in a lower type. With this certificate there are thus two choices: repeat the year in the current level, or go to a lower level without having to repeat its year. With a 'C'-certificate the pupil has to repeat its year, whether or not it continues secondary education on the same level.

So, 'choices' of options and the performance in a chosen option, channel pupils into different tracks.

Using the educational type in the first, the third and the sixth year of secondary education, we can map the most common types of secondary education careers.

The different levels that we discern in each of the three grades are:

In the 1st year: A (general) or B (prevocational)

In the 3rd and 6th year: A (general), T (technical)² or V (vocational)

In each of these years we also have an additional category O, which means that the subject is out of normal fulltime secondary education at this stage.

Using the different levels in the three grades, we can distinguish different tracks pupils followed in secondary school, such as A-A-A (general in the 1st year, the 3rd and 6th year) or A-T-V (general in the 1st, Technical in the 3rd and Vocational in the 6th year).

Of all possible combinations, only 11 occur with a proportion of at least 1%. As the 'other' category is quite small in the first year, but becomes somewhat more important in the years to follow, we can take together three combinations that had a 3rd and a 6th year in the 'other' category (A-O-O, B-O-O and O-O-O) into X-O-O. If we only keep this limited set of combinations of these categories, we clearly have captured the possible paths through the secondary educational system. Only 1% of the respondents followed another path through secondary education, and cannot be put directly into one of these 12 combinations. In table 1 we enumerate the most common 'types' in secondary education, together with the proportions in the population. The pupils who drop out of normal fulltime secondary education are placed below.

² In this category 'technical' we also consider the pupils in 'artistic' secondary education.

TABLE 1: DIFFERENT TRACKS THROUGH SECONDARY EDUCATION, OVERALL DISTRIBUTION AND PROPORTIONS OF GIRLS

TYPE	N	Total	Girls	Boys	% girls
A-A-A	1223	41%	46%	36%	55%
A-A-T	302	10%	9%	11%	44%
A-A-V	46	2%	2%	1%	52%
A-T-T	531	18%	16%	20%	43%
A-T-V	158	5%	5%	6%	44%
A-V-V	242	8%	8%	8%	50%
B-V-V	141	5%	5%	4%	56%
A-A-O	42	1%	1%	2%	29%
A-T-O	79	3%	2%	3%	37%
A-V-O	81	3%	2%	3%	40%
B-V-O	74	2%	2%	3%	39%
X-O-O	56	2%	2%	2%	50%
Total	2975	100%			49%

The A-A-A type (general education in all years) by large is the biggest category, with a representation of 41%. This 'highest' type is more common for girls than for boys: 46% of the girls followed this 'highest' track, as compared to 'only' 36% of the boys. If we look somewhat closer to the distributions by gender in each secondary educational type, we seem to get the picture that lowering the educational level during the career is a somewhat more male phenomenon. The girls both start their education high and stay at that high level, or they start low. This seems to indicate that the males start secondary education with more unrealistic ambitions than females, which they cannot realise as they then encounter more difficulties in their continuing educational career.

It is also significant that in almost all tracks that do not lead to a certificate of secondary education (ending with -O), boys are overrepresented. Drop out from secondary school typically is a male phenomenon. Boys and girls are equally represented in the 'X-O-O'-track, but this track refers to a career of pupils who never reached the 3rd year in normal secondary education. In most cases it concerns pupils who move to special educational programs, have a chronic disease, ... Of all those who drop out from secondary school (after the 3rd year), 63% are male and 37% are female.

The gender differences in secondary school seem to persist at the start of higher education. 66% of the women go to further education, and 56% of the men. Finally, in the level of education that the respondents have attained at the age of 23, Flemish women clearly have better credentials than the men do.

TABLE 2: ATTAINED EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IN FOUR CATEGORIES (IN % - N= 2982)

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Respondents who didn't complete secondary education	15	10	12
Respondents who finished secondary education with a diploma or certificate	29	24	26
Respondents who started higher education, but did not (yet) complete this with a diploma or certificate	29	21	25
Respondents who completed higher education – whether academic or not	28	45	36
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

12% of the 23-year olds in the SONAR-sample has no degree of secondary education. 26% has a diploma of secondary education but didn't try to get a higher degree. This category also comprises youth that completed the 6th year vocational secondary education (who strictly speaking have no diploma but a certificate of secondary education). The next group differs from the previous one because they started higher education after their secondary education. However, they have not completed this higher study. This applies to 25% of the respondents. It is important to note that this group not only consists of persons who failed in higher education, or who stopped their further studies, but also of persons who are still in their further studies. A final group has a diploma of higher education. About one third of the respondents belongs to these highly educated.

Boys and girls are clearly distributed differently along these four levels. The highest category, the one's with a diploma of higher education, is clearly more prevalent among the girls than the boys. In each of the three lower levels boys are overrepresented.

In section 2 we focus on the transition from school to work to find out whether the better performances of girls in school and their higher educational levels at the age of 23 are also reflected in better positions in the labour market.

2 Men and women's entry the labour market

2.1 Finding work?

Table 3 shows that at the time of the survey, almost three-quarters of the 23-year olds from the SONAR-survey is working. As “workers” are considered those with a paid job of at least one working hour a week and an employment contract of at least one month. Some more men than women have a paid job (75% and 72% respectively). Approximately half of the workers is still in their first job, while the other half already had several jobs. Approximately 11% left school, but did not work at the moment of the survey. With “non-workers” we understand unemployed and non-active

people. There are more women than men in this category (14% and 8% respectively).

TABLE 3 : ACTIVITY AND ACTIVITY RATES AT THE AGE OF 23 (IN % - N=2988)

	<i>Working</i>			<i>Non-working</i>			<i>Studying</i>			<i>Activity Rate</i>		
	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total
	74,8	72,2	73,6	8,5	14,2	11,3	17,6	13,6	15,2	89,7	83,6	86,7
No Dipl. ³	83,5	66,4	77,2	14,3	32,9	21,2	2,1	0,7	1,6	85,3	66,9	78,4
Sec. Edu.	71,1	64,0	68,0	7,2	14,6	10,4	21,7	21,4	21,6	90,8	81,4	86,8
High. Edu. 1c	84,3	87,6	86,5	7,9	7,2	7,4	7,9	5,2	6,1	91,5	92,4	92,1
Academic	68,9	65,4	67,1	8,2	16,5	12,3	23,0	18,1	20,5	89,4	79,9	84,5

It is important to notice that the aforementioned percentages are related to the total SONAR-sample, so those still studying are also taken into account. The proportion of respondents still studying is well important. Some more than 15% of the 3.000 respondents still has to complete their studies. As mentioned before, the proportion of men still at school at the age of 23 is somewhat higher than the proportion of women (18% and 14% respectively). Because of this substantial group of students in the sample, we decided not to take the students into account and to consider only the activity rates of those who already left school. We define the “activity rate” as the proportion of people with a job among the non-students. Leaving aside those who are still at an educational stage, 87% of the respondents is working at the age of 23. Young men clearly have higher activity rates than the women (90% and 84% respectively).

The activity rates also vary considerably according to the educational level. For men, but mainly for women, we can see that the proportion of workers increases with the educational level. Except for respondents who completed university, higher educated people tend to find a job much more easily. Those with an academic degree are mainly freshly-graduated people who have had fairly little time to find a job. At all educational levels except for

³ We subdivide the attained educational level into four categories:

No Diploma (No Dipl.): Respondents who didn't complete secondary education

Secondary Education (Sec. Edu.): Respondents who finished secondary education with a diploma or certificate

Higher Education 1 cycle (High. Edu. 1c): Respondents who finished higher education of 1 cycle

Academic Higher Education (Academic): Respondents who completed academic education (university, higher education of 2 cycles)

those who finished higher education of one cycle, the activity rate is somewhat lower for women than for men.

TABLE 4: AVERAGE DURATION BETWEEN LEAVING SCHOOL AND FINDING A FIRST JOB (IN MONTHS) (N=2570)

	Men	Women	Total	Sign.
No Dipl.	8,0	16,7	11,4	0,000
Sec. Edu.	4,5	8,6	6,5	0,000
High. Edu. 1c	2,8	2,1	2,4	0,023
Academic	5,4	5,9	5,7	0,324
Total	5,3	8,2	6,8	0,000

If we focus on how quickly people find a first job, we observe that it takes on average 3 months more for a woman to find the first job than for a man (table 4). With no diploma of higher education, it takes two times longer for a woman to find a first job than for a man with an equivalent educational degree. For those who finished higher education it takes about as much time for a woman to find a first job than for a man.

2.2 Working conditions and characteristics

From the previous it is clear that the activity rates of women are lower and in general that it takes more time for them to find a first job. But what about the quality of the jobs they have?

Looking at the *working conditions*⁴ we already note some differences between men and women at the age of 23. In this study, 30 items were presented to the respondents questioning whether these items apply to their last job (using four answer categories each time). Based upon the answers on these 30 individual items, we constructed 7 scales, referring to: (1) work pressure, (2) working under bad or heavy physical circumstances, (3) job with a lot of mental effort, (4) the creativity the job requires and therefore the feeling of accomplishment it gives, (5) working with other people, (6) the necessity in the job of basic skills like the ability to read and write, the knowledge of another languages, the ability to calculate and computer skills, and (7) the liberty to take decisions yourself (autonomy) and the possibility to learn during the working hours. For the construction of these scales we refer to appendix 2.

As far as the working circumstances are concerned, we notice significant differences between the different educational levels, except for work pressure (table 5). Higher educated people work under better professional circumstances, occupy a function requiring more mental effort and creativity. They also tend to work more with other people, more often they

⁴ In the study, people were polled on the working conditions of their current (or in case of unemployment last) job.

need to have specific skills and are given more autonomy in their work than people with a lower educational level.

TABLE 5 : WORKING CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE LAST JOB (AVERAGES, ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10) (N=2392)

	<i>Work pressure</i>			<i>Bad circumst.</i>			<i>Mental effort</i>		
	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total
	6,1	6,1	6,1	4,0	3,4	3,9	6,8	6,6	6,7
No Dipl.	6,1	6,2	6,1	5,6	4,5	5,0	6,3	5,5	5,9
Sec. Edu.	5,9	6,2	6,1	4,8	3,9	4,3	6,7	6,3	6,5
High. Edu. 1c	6,3	6,2	6,2	3,1	3,0	3,1	7,3	7,4	7,3
Academic	6,1	6,0	6,1	2,4	2,2	2,3	7,0	7,0	7,0

	<i>Creativity</i>			<i>People</i>			<i>Basic skills</i>			<i>Autonomy</i>		
	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total
	7,8	7,4	7,6	8,6	8,8	8,7	6,9	6,4	6,4	5,4	5,0	5,0
No Dipl.	7,2	6,5	6,9	8,1	8,3	8,2	5,0	4,4	4,7	4,2	3,6	3,9
Sec. Edu.	7,5	7,4	7,5	8,4	8,9	8,6	6,0	5,8	5,9	4,6	4,3	4,5
High. Edu. 1c	8,1	8,2	8,2	9,0	9,3	9,2	7,9	7,5	7,7	6,1	5,9	6,0
Academic	8,2	7,6	7,9	8,9	9,0	9,0	8,6	7,9	8,3	6,7	6,0	6,4

Looking closer at the differences between men and women, we observe a significant difference on all of the categories, except on the extent of work pressure. Women tend to work less under bad or heavy physical circumstances and are much more in contact with other people than men are. On the other hand, women have jobs that require less mental effort as well as less creativity. Moreover women are given less autonomy in their job and do not need as many basic skills as men do.

From the *average net incomes*⁵ of the respondents it seems very clear that income increases with the educational level. The net income difference between lower and higher educated respondents represents more or less 315 euro per month. Table 6 also makes clear that women still earn less than men. The average monthly net income for a man of 23 is about 1125 euro. The monthly average net income of a woman of the same age is more or less 180 euro lower. At all educational levels, women earn less than men do.

⁵ In SONAR 76(23) the net income was questioned using 13 categories of income; but was recoded to the 'midpoints' in each category to calculate the averages.

TABLE 6: AVERAGE NET INCOMES PER MONTH (IN EURO) (N=2265)

	Men	Women	Total
No Dipl.	1025	740	885
Sec. Edu.	1080	850	965
High. Edu. 1c	1130	1045	1085
Academic	1265	1140	1200
Total	1125	945	1025

Finally we evaluate under which *contract* and *status* the respondents work and whether the job can be considered as brainwork or manual work. Again it seems that women's situation is less favourable. Most of the 23-year olds work full-time (85%, see table 7), but more men than women have a full-time job (95% against 73% for women). Women work much more with a part-time contract. Not only do women work more part-time, they also have more fixed-term contracts. 52% of the women works in a fixed-term contract against 40% of the men. Table 7 also indicates that brainwork is more typical for women (72% against 55% for the men). Maybe what surprising, women are not less submitted to shift-work than men are. The percentage is mainly higher among women with a college degree of one cycle (the healthcare sector is one of the sectors with a lot of women having such a diploma). Table 7 also makes clear that shift work is more common among the lower educated.

TABLE 7 : BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAST JOB (PERCENTAGES)

	<i>Brainwork</i> (N=2343)			<i>Full time working</i> (N=2252)			<i>Shift work</i> (N=2231)			<i>Open-ended employ. contract</i> (N=2255)		
	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total	Men	Wo- men	Total
	54,9	72,1	58,6	94,5	73,1	84,8	19,8	21,7	25,0	60,0	47,5	54,6
No Dipl.	10,4	27,2	18,8	94,1	57,0	75,5	27,7	29,8	28,8	71,8	61,4	66,6
Sec. Edu.	28,3	64,1	46,2	95,0	70,8	82,9	31,9	30,1	31,0	66,3	57,4	62,0
High. Edu. 1c	87,5	98,8	93,1	91,8	83,1	87,5	15,8	21,3	18,5	48,4	32,1	40,2
Academic	93,3	98,1	95,7	97,1	81,5	89,3	3,8	5,5	4,7	53,3	38,9	46,1

Although women in general have better school careers than men, it seems that they take in less favourable positions in the labour market. The transition from school to work seems to be less smooth for women than for men. There are more women than men without a job at the age of 23. Moreover it takes almost 3 months more for women to find their first job than for men. In comparison with lowly educated men, lowly educated women need double as much time to find their first job. Once working, women tend to occupy less favourable jobs than men do. Although women seem to work under less bad and heavy physical circumstances and are

much more in contact with other people in their jobs, more women have jobs requiring less mental effort and creativity. Women in general have less autonomy at work and their job requires less basic skills than men's work. Furthermore, women still have a lower income as compared to men. Concerning the type of contracts, the situation of women again seems less favourable than men's. Women clearly work more part-time and on the basis of fixed-term contracts than men do.

3 Does family formation matter?

Data presented in the previous sections clearly indicate that something odd is happening in the transition from school to work, as the gender differences in performance in education seem to shift once entered into the labour market. We hypothesize that this might well have to do with gender differences in the pace of family formation. In this section we first present some evidence about family formation differences between women and men, and secondly we will look at whether the worse position of women in the labour market can be explained by their earlier family formation.

3.1 Different pace of family formation between men and women

Almost 10% of the respondents already has children at the age of 23, but women of this age have children almost three times more often than men (see table 8). Having children is more prevalent among the lowly educated, especially among the women with low qualifications. Women get their first child at earlier ages than the men. Both for men and women, there's a strong association of age at first child birth with the educational level. This could well be because the higher educated leave the educational system at older age. But this doesn't seem to be the case, as also the timing of having the first child after having left school increases with the educational level. So the higher educated postpone having children longer, whereas the lowly educated start having children much more rapidly after leaving school.

TABLE 8: HAVING CHILDREN AT THE AGE OF 23

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
No Dipl.	15%	45%	26%
Sec. Edu.	4%	19%	10%
High. Edu. 1c	2%	1%	1%
Academic	2%	3%	2%
Total	5%	14%	9%

One in five of 23-year olds is living together with a partner (both in marriage and in cohabitation, see table 9). At each educational level the women are living together more than the men. Youngsters with higher educational qualifications are living together less frequently. Looking at the timing of first time living together, women start living together at an earlier age than men,

and more quickly after their first time of leaving school. With regard to the educational level, the first time of living together occurs at an earlier age with poorer qualifications. But this seems to be attributable to the age one leaves school. Indeed, the timing of leaving the parental home doesn't seem to differ much when the duration is expressed as the time since school leaving.

TABLE 9: LIVING TOGETHER WITH A PARTNER AT THE AGE OF 23

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
No Dipl.	29%	59%	40%
Sec. Edu.	18%	40%	27%
High. Edu. 1c	7%	33%	25%
Academic	4%	16%	10%
Total	16%	37%	26%

From the evidence presented, we can conclude that women start earlier with family formation. They leave the parental home to go to live together sooner than men, and start having children much more quickly too, both with reference to their age at these events as to the duration since leaving school. Perhaps this might explain why women seem to underperform at the labour market given their higher educational degrees.

3.2 Starting a family and getting a job

As already mentioned in section 2 the women are underrepresented in the working population. On average, they are waiting longer before they start working, not so much at the higher educational levels, but much more at the lower educational levels, where the mean time before starting to work for women is double the mean time for men.

TABLE 10: MEAN TIME BEFORE STARTING TO WORK AFTER THE FIRST TIME OF LEAVING SCHOOL BY HAVING CHILDREN BEFORE STARTING FIRST JOB (IN MONTHS)

	<u>Without children</u>			<u>With children</u>		
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Sign</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Sign</i>
No Dipl.	8,3	10,5	0,090	6,1	24,2	0,001
Sec. Edu.	4,4	8,5	0,000	5,2	8,8	0,254
High. Edu. 1c	2,8	2,1	0,025	--	1,0	--
Academic	5,4	5,9	0,317	--	2,0	--

From table 10 it is clear that among the most lowly educated women with children the mean duration before starting to work is much higher than for the other youngsters. Respondents who have children before they start to work are almost only lowly educated women (in grey: N<50). Essentially the pattern of gender differences and differences by educational levels remains,

but is somewhat less pronounced when looking only at the respondents without children before their first job. At the lowest educational level the difference between the men and women no longer is statistically significant.

TABLE 11: MEAN TIME BEFORE STARTING TO WORK AFTER THE FIRST TIME OF LEAVING SCHOOL BY LIVING TOGETHER BEFORE STARTING FIRST JOB (IN MONTHS)

	<i>Not living together</i>			<i>Living together</i>		
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Sign</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Sign</i>
No Dipl.	9,1	15,0	0,043	5,6	16,8	0,000
Sec. Edu.	5,0	9,4	0,000	3,0	7,8	0,000
High. Edu. 1c	2,8	2,6	0,245	1,6	1,4	0,250
Academic	5,5	6,2	0,263	1,1	4,3	0,449

Men seem to start working more quickly when they are living together. In general this holds for the women too, with the only exception of the most lowly educated category. This somewhat closes the extreme gender gap at the lowest educational level when only the group that hasn't been living with a partner is considered. For those not living together, with a higher educational degree of one cycle, the difference between men and women disappears almost completely. These results should be interpreted cautiously however, as some groups become quite small (in grey: N<50).

It seems clear that the slower rate with which women start working after they have left school is partly due to the differences in family formation between women and men. Especially the biggest gender gap, in the group without even a degree of secondary education, is more pronounced when one is living together or when there are children before starting to work.

3.3 Job prestige

In section 2 it was concluded that men and women differ on many job characteristics, and overall the jobs of men seem to be preferable over those of women. As an overall indicator of success in the labour market, we take the prestige of the last job the respondents have (had) at the age of 23. We use the professional prestige indicator developed by Sixma and Ultee (1983), which is based on rankings of professions by social status. At the top of the scale are dentists, judges, professors and mayors, at the bottom window-cleaners, chimney sweepers and garbage collectors. The range of the scale is 15 to 86.

TABLE 12: JOB PRESTIGE OF MEN AND WOMEN AT THE AGE OF 23

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mean	41,8	42,9	42,3
Median	39,0	47,0	44,0
Std. Deviation	18,6	18,0	18,3

When we look at the mean level on job prestige, we see little difference between the young men and women (respectively 42 and 43, n.s.). However, we know that on average the women have reached a higher education at the age of 23, so when we take into account the educational level the respondents have reached, clearly women have lower scores on job prestige. At each educational level we discern, the mean scores of women are lower than those of men (see table 13). The gender gap however is not the same at all educational levels, men and women with relatively high degrees do not differ much, but among the lowly educated the advantage of men over women is much bigger.

TABLE 13: MEAN SCORES ON JOB PRESTIGE (N=2378)

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>N men</i>	<i>N women</i>
No Dipl.	29,6	23,2	(227)	(127)
Sec. Edu.	37,2	32,3	(657)	(465)
High. Edu. 1c	56,4	53,7	(206)	(451)
Academic	64,9	64,8	(122)	(123)
Total	41,8	43,0	(1.212)	(1.166)

Table 13 clearly shows that job prestige is strongly related to educational level. But because of the bigger gap between men and women at the lower levels, education is more important for women than for men in terms of job prestige: the difference in job prestige for the highest degree and the lowest degree is 35 for men, and 42 for women. This means we have a interaction effect between gender and educational level for job prestige.

TABLE 14: REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR JOB PRESTIGE (B AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL)

(Constant)	41,79***	9,33***	12,62***
Women / men	1,27°	-2,48***	-9,89***
Educational level ⁶		10,31***	9,27***
Women * Educational level			2,22***

*** p<0.001 / ° p<0.1

The regression coefficients show the same pattern. Without controlling for educational level, women have slightly higher job prestige than men. However, after controlling, women do worse than men. Educational level is an important predictor for job prestige. The effect of educational level is stronger for women than for men. The final coefficients indicate that at the lower educational levels women do much worse than men, but at the higher educational levels there is equality between the sexes (job prestige for men = 12,6 + 9,3 * educational level; job prestige for women = 2,7 + 11,5 * educational level).

⁶ From this point onwards we will use in the analyses a slightly more elaborate version of educational degree, which in essence subdivides the lowest and the highest category in two more detailed categories, and thus ranges from 1 to 6.

FIGURE 4: BASE MODEL JOB PRESTIGE: MEN

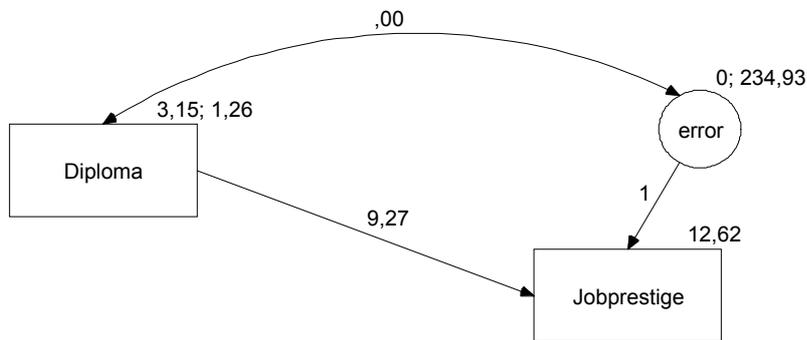
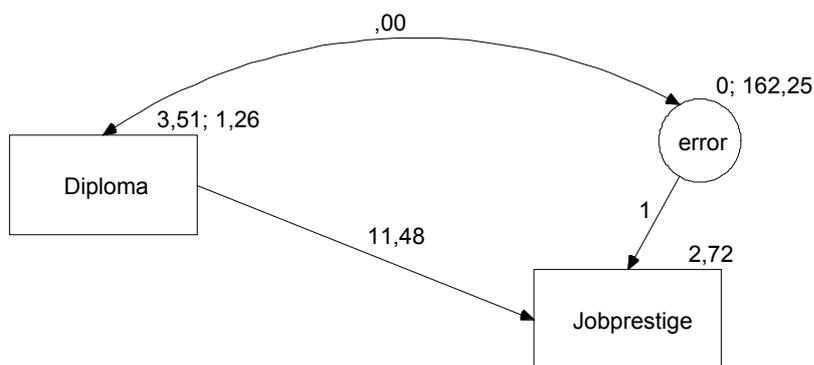


FIGURE 5: BASE MODEL JOB PRESTIGE: WOMEN



The figures 4 and 5 show the parameters from a simultaneous estimation of this base model for men and women⁷. Besides the unstandardised effect parameters, for each variable in the model the mean score, followed by the variance is displayed.

The only parameters in this base model that can be considered being the same for men and women, is the variance in educational level, and the zero-correlation between the educational level and the error term. These models do not differ in a statistically significant way from the observed data ($\chi^2=2,076$, $df=1$, $p=0,150$), and would only have to be rejected with more than 4000 observations (Hoelters'N= 4.380), whereas the actual number of observations is about 2500. Obviously this model predicts job prestige better for women than for men (the unexplained variance being 235 for men and 162 for women).

⁷ The models for men and women were estimated simultaneously both to have more stable parameters, and to be able to test whether the parameters differ for men and women.

3.4 Does family formation explain gender differentials in job prestige?

It is clear that women perform worse than men in terms of job prestige, not so much at the high educational levels, but very much at the lower levels. To investigate whether family formation can explain these gender differentials in job prestige, we include in our base model the two indicators for family formation: having children, and living together with a partner at the age of 23. We do not assume a one-way causal effect between educational level and family formation, because most likely both influence each other, depending on the sequence and aspirations (see figures 6 and 7).

The only possible extra restriction on the parameters (given the fit to the data), is to equate the direct effect of living with a partner on job prestige for men and women. This model fits quite well with the data ($\chi^2=2,438$, $df=2$, $p=0,296$), and would only have to be rejected with almost 6.000 observations (Hoelters' $N= 5.816$).

Both men and women who are living with a partner have a small but statistically significant smaller job prestige. Living together with a partner has the same influence for women and men. Having children proves to be an important correlate of a lower job prestige. Men with children have a lower job prestige than men without children. For women having children at the age of 23 is even more important than for men. Women with children on average have a job prestige 6 points lower than their counterparts without children. For men, having children means a decrease of almost 3 points on the scale of job prestige.

From the model it is also clear that the association of family formation with the educational level is stronger for women than men. Living with a partner and having children is more prevalent among youth with relatively low educational degrees, and is most prevalent among young women with poor qualifications.

Including family formation in the model evidently is more important for women than for men. This is also indicated by the higher reduction in the unexplained variance for women than for men.

FIGURE 6: MODEL FAMILY FORMATION ON JOB PRESTIGE: MEN (R²= 0,32)

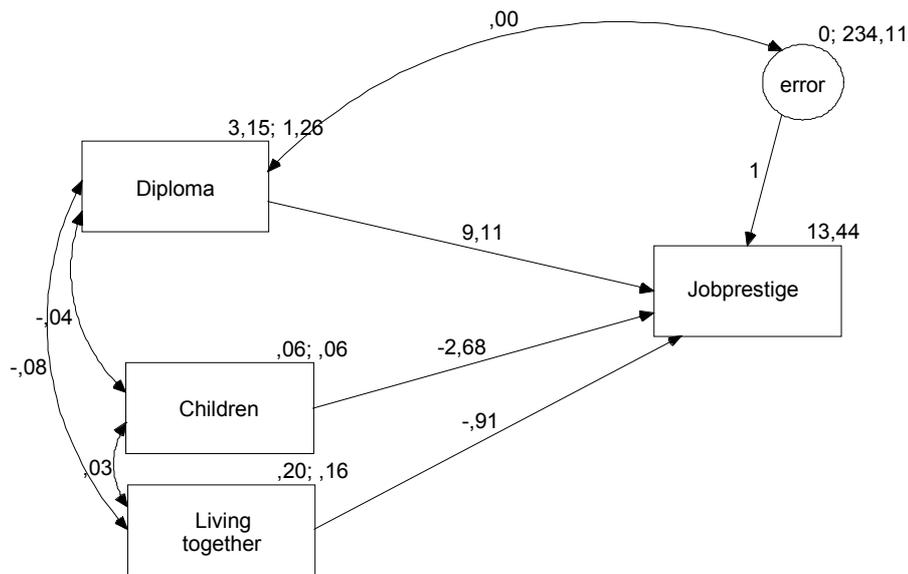
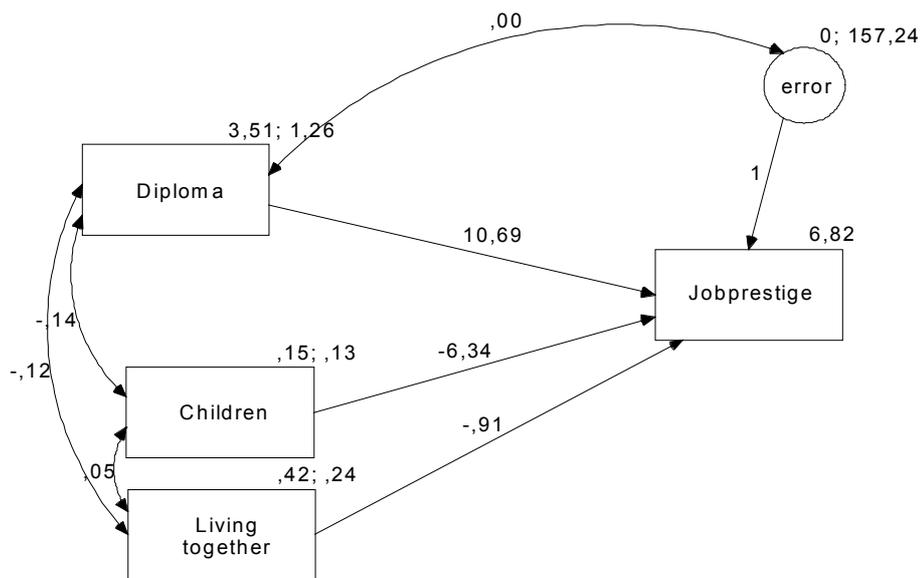


FIGURE 7: MODEL FAMILY FORMATION ON JOB PRESTIGE: WOMEN (R²= 0,52)



SUMMARY OF PARAMETERS

Base Model:

job prestige for men = 12,6 + 9,3* educational level

job prestige for women = 2,7 + 11,5* educational level

Model with Family Formation:

job prestige for men = 13,4 + 9,1* educational level - 2,7* children - 0,9* living with partner

job prestige for women = 6,8 + 10,7* educational level - 6,3* children - 0,9* living with partner

4 The bottom line

Can we explain the gender differences in job prestige by family formation, after controlling for the educational level? Do women lose the advantage they built up in education, because of earlier family formation? Having children seems to explain part of the relatively worse position of women when entering into the labour market. Also, controlled for family formation, the connection between educational level and job prestige is somewhat more equal for men and women. So, living with a partner, and especially having children, explains some of the differences between men and women.

Especially at lower educational levels, women drop behind the men in terms of reaching a high job prestige. Not living with a partner, and having no children at an early age seems to be beneficial to get a prestigious job. Some of the gender differentials in job prestige can be explained by the fact that early family formation is more common among the lowly educated, and especially among the lowly educated women. These women do worse, because they have children. We can expect however, that the better educated women will suffer from the family roles later on in their careers. Their education not only slowed down family formation, but making a career, even from a good starting position, is harmful to family life. The combination of a demanding job with (small) children is still a burden for women. Men have less problems combining a career with family; traditional gender roles, even in societies with a high participation of women in the labour market, seem to persist (see e.g. Elchardus & Glorieux, 1994; Glorieux, Koelet & Moens, 2001; Glorieux & Koelet, 2002; Glorieux & Vandeweyer, 2002). The longitudinal character of the SONAR-study makes it possible to follow the careers of the cohort born in 1976. We hypothesize that the gender gap in the careers of men and women, even among the higher educated, will increase as they grow older.

On the other hand, it is not only family formation and traditional gender roles that cause inequality between men and women on the labour market. Controlled for family formation, the differences in job prestige level between men and women have not completely disappeared. Men with poor qualifications still have some advantage over women with low educational levels, even when they have no children. It is obvious that gender as an ascribed characteristic, still influences processes of social mobility. Even if boys and girls receive an equal treatment at school, it is clear that educational achievement is not the only factor in determining one's chances on the labour market. This is not only in contradiction with our ideal of a meritocracy, but above all it seems that a lot of women's talents are not fully realised.

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Appendix 1: The educational system in Flanders⁸

1. General outline

The Belgian Constitution provides that every child has a right to education. During 12 full school years everyone has to be in education. This compulsory education starts on September 1st of the year in which a child reaches the age of 6, until the end of the school year in which the pupil reaches the age of 18. From the age of 15 (in some cases 16), young people can opt for part-time education and part-time work. However, the majority of the pupils continue to receive full-time education.

Traditionally, there are three levels of education: elementary, secondary and higher education. At the level of elementary and secondary education there is also special education, which is aimed at children and adolescents with a physical or mental disability, with behavioural problems or with serious learning difficulties. Besides these traditional educational levels there's also an offer of continuing education in Flanders, which is primarily aimed at adults.

THE FLEMISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN A NUTSHELL

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION		SECONDARY EDUCATION			HIGHER EDUCATION **			CONTINUING EDUCATION
nursery school 1-2-3	primary education 1-2-3-4-5-6	unified system			1-cycle higher education 1-2-3			part-time adult education
		1-2- 1st grade	1-2- 2nd grade	1-2-(3) 3rd grade	2-cycle higher education 1-2- 3-4- 1st cycle 2nd cycle			part-time artistic education
special nursery school	special primary education	special secondary education *			university education 1-2- 3-4-(5) (5)-6-7 1st cycle 2nd cycle 3rd cycle			vocational training offered by the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency ("VDAB") *** training for the self-employed offered by the Flemish Institute for the Self-Employed ("VIZO") *** social-cultural education ***
theoretical age								
(2,5)-3-4-5	6-7-8-9-10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	22-23-24	adults

Remarks:

* special secondary education is meant for pupils aged 13 to 21

** for some lines of study, the second cycle of 2-cycle higher education takes 3 years, the first cycle of university education takes 3 years and the second cycle of university education takes 3 or 4 years.

*** these training programmes do not come under the Education Department

Source: Education in Flanders. Fact Sheet. November 1997, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Education Department

2. Elementary education: nursery school and primary education

Elementary education comprises both nursery school and primary education. Although nursery and primary education are separate from the

⁸ Based upon: Education in Flanders. A broad view of the Flemish educational landscape, 2001, Ministry of the Flemish Community. Education Department.

structural point of view, attempts are made to create an easy transition from one to the other.

Mainstream nursery education is available for children from 2,5 to 6 years. Although nursery education is not compulsory, almost all children receive nursery education in Flanders.

Mainstream primary education is aimed at children from the ages of 6 to 12 and comprises 6 consecutive years. The start of primary education normally coincides with the start of compulsory education (the age of 6). In most primary schools one works with a system of year classes, in which each class has its own teacher. At the end of primary education, pupils who have achieved the targets of the curriculum receive a certificate of primary education.

3. Secondary education

Since 1989, full-time secondary education has been organised in accordance with a unified system in which a great deal of importance is attached to the core curriculum. This uniform structure comprises stages, types of education, and study disciplines. The definite choice of subjects is postponed until the second stage so those are first introduced to as many subjects as possible. This first stage is considered to be an 'orientation' stage. From the second stage, there are four different types of education and the pupil can choose for a particular course of study. A number of these courses only start in the third or even fourth stage (mainly nursing).

- In general secondary education (aso), the emphasis is on broad general education, which particularly provides a firm foundation for going into higher education.
- In technical secondary education (tso), the emphasis is particularly on general and technical theoretical subjects. After tso, young people can carry out a profession or go into higher education. This education also includes practical lessons.
- In secondary education in the arts (kso), a broad general education is combined with active art education. After kso, young people can carry out a profession or go on to higher education.
- Vocational secondary education (bso) is a practical type of education in which young people learn a specific vocation in addition to receiving general education.

In the second and third stage there is a common and an optional part. In the optional part, the core curriculum is supplemented with a broad range of possible subjects. In the third stage, the specific education can be further narrowed down with a view to the ultimate choice of profession or possible educational careers in higher education.

A pupil gains the certificate of secondary education after successfully completing six years of aso, tso, or kso or seven years of bso. With a certificate of secondary education from any school, type of education or course of study, a young person has unrestricted access to higher education.

	GENERAL	TECHNICAL	ARTISTIC	VOCATIONAL
4th grade				(3rd year BSO) (2nd year BSO) (1st year BSO)
3rd grade	(3rd year preparing for HE/ specialisation year)	(3rd year preparing for HE/ specialisation year)	(3rd year preparing for HE/ specialisation year)	(3rd specialisation year)
	2nd year ASO 1st year ASO	2nd year TSO 1st year TSO	2nd year KSO 1st year KSO	2nd year BSO 1st year BSO
2nd grade				(3rd year perfection BSO)
	2nd year ASO 1st year ASO	2nd year TSO 1st year TSO	2nd year KSO 1st year KSO	2nd year BSO 1st year BSO
1st grade	2nd year A 1st year A			BVL 1st year B

ASO general secondary education
 TSO technical secondary education
 KSO artistic secondary education
 BSO vocational secondary education
 BVL prevocational year
 HE higher education
 The years between brackets are optional

Source: Education in Flanders. Fact Sheet. November 1997, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Education Department

From the age of 15 or 16, pupils can transfer to a part-time system. Young people can follow training in part-time vocational secondary education (dbso). They can also opt for a work placement while receiving entrepreneurship training or for a recognised part-time training course. Dbso is organised at a part-time education centre. The aim is to supplement this training with a job that should correspond to the training in the centre if possible. With this type of education it is possible to gain a certificate, though this is not equivalent to the certificate granted at the end of full-time vocational secondary education. Pupils who wish to follow practical training for a self-employed profession, can conclude an apprenticeship contract with the head of a company/trainer. At the end of the training, successful trainees receive an 'apprenticeship' certificate.

4. Tertiary education

Colleges of higher education as well as universities provide Tertiary education. In Flanders the (only) general condition for admission to tertiary education is the certificate of secondary education. About half of the Flemish youth chooses to go on to tertiary education.

Colleges of higher education offer a broad range of basic courses that can be organised in 11 disciplines. The courses cover either one cycle (3 years) or 2 cycles (normally 2 years each). The basic courses of 1 cycle are

focused on the acquisition of professional skills supported by scientific knowledge. The aim is to give the students practical and professional skills so that they are able to enter a profession after this study. The basic courses of 2 cycles have an academic character and are based on scientific knowledge. They contribute to general education as a whole and are focussed in particular on the application of science, independent thinking and the development of creativity. In addition, the colleges of higher education can also organise continuing education for college graduates.

Academic education provided by the universities is characterised by the integration of education and research. There are six universities in Flanders. The basic university courses are divided into 2 cycles. The first cycle concludes with a first candidate's degree and lasts 2 years. The second cycle usually lasts 2 or 3 years, but for some courses even longer, and mostly conclude with a licentiate's (master's) degree. The third cycle, which leads to the academic title of 'doctor', can only be concluded after the public defence of the doctoral thesis. The academic education is organised in 18 main study domains, in which there are a great number of different courses. More and more, the universities also organise advanced academic courses (supplementary and specialised courses).

Appendix 2: Scales for working conditions

In the SONAR-survey, respondents were polled on their job characteristics. The respondents were asked to indicate for 30 characteristics/items whether these apply to their job (using four categories of answers each time, from entirely disagree to entirely agree). Based on the answers on these 30 individual items, seven scales were derived, by taking together the items that correlated most. The score on each of the seven scales is the sum of the scores on each individual characteristic. Finally we recoded the score to a 1 (entirely disagree on all items) to 10 (entirely agree on all items) scale.

Scales and matching characteristics/items

(1) Work pressure (2 items)

- I have to work at a great pace
- I have to work under pressure of time

(2) Bad or heavy physical circumstances (5 items)

- I do work in which I make myself dirty
- I have to work in smelly surroundings
- I have to work in noisy surroundings
- I have to work in dangerous or insecure circumstances
- My job requires much physical effort

(3) Mental effort (4 items)

- My job requires much creative ideas
- My work requires many responsibilities
- My job requires much mental effort
- I do work by which I do the same things all the time (*negative*)

(4) Creativity (5 items)

- I do work by which I can show my abilities
- I do work by which I can learn new things
- I do varied work
- I do work in which I can indulge myself
- I do work of which I see the results

(5) Working with people (3 items)

- I do work by which I have contact with other people
- I do work by which I have to work with other people

- I do work in which I have to be good at managing other people

(6) Basic skills (*4 items*)

- In my work I must be able to work on computer
- In my work I have to know several languages
- In my work I have to be able to speak and write Dutch fluently
- My work requires the use of calculus skills

(7) Autonomy (*6 items*)

- In my work I can decide what to do on a particular day
- In my work I can decide how much to work on a day
- In my work I can decide how I do my work
- In my work I have to study regularly to keep up-to-date
- In my work I have to follow courses regularly
- In my work I must direct others