

Chapter 4

Towards an action plan for jobs in Flanders, Belgium: Recommendations and best practices

Stimulating job creation at the local level requires integrated actions across employment, training and economic development portfolios. Co-ordinated place-based policies can help workers find suitable jobs, while also contributing to demand by stimulating productivity. This requires flexible policy management frameworks, information, and integrated partnerships which leverage the efforts of local stakeholders. This chapter outlines the key recommendations emerging from the OECD review of local job creation policies in Flanders, Belgium.

Better aligning programmes and policies to local economic development

Recommendation: Build on the high level of flexibility within employment services and continue to build partnerships and horizontal accountability mechanisms, which promote growth and employment. This can be done by identifying the best collaboration models which have led to strong policy integration and co-ordination.

Previous OECD research examined the level of flexibility within the employment service in Flanders and concluded that more flexibility was needed to give local employment offices a greater leadership role in formulating strategies and partnerships which tackle issues related to labour market activation, employment, economic development and inclusion (Bogaerts et al., 2011). Recent reforms introduced within VDAB have sought to equip local employment service managers with more discretion in the implementation of employment policies, which is a welcome development. Furthermore, giving local offices budget flexibility to design programmes in partnership with other actors will reduce duplication and create synergies in policy delivery.

Following the crisis, partnerships are a key governance tool to better connect the supply and demand of skills to ensure greater economic growth and productivity. This study has highlighted good examples of local collaboration among agencies and local governments. VDAB has many partnership agreements involving a plethora of networks and organisations, which contributes to a situation of relative institutional density. Within Antwerp, the Employment and Economic Development department of the city is a good example of a governance unit established within a local area to co-ordinate actions, which promote job creation, skills, and employment. If it does not already exist, other cities in Flanders could learn from this organisational structure as a best practice in organising local development efforts. There is also a level of horizontal accountability, which has been established between VDAB and the City of Antwerp, which should be replicated across other regions in Flanders.

Going forward, it is important that the government explore how to further reduce policy silos locally through horizontal governance arrangements. For example, if organisations are collaborating in Flanders, often, a co-ordinator has to be appointed from one of the organisations, which represents a separate resource for collaboration. Sometimes, this can impact the nature of collaboration because the co-ordinator will primarily represent the interests of their own organisation, as opposed to the overall partnership. Feedback from local stakeholders consulted for this study also point to the benefits that could be achieved by having an intermediary organisation that can lead co-ordination among the relevant actors.

There is an opportunity for the Flemish government to explore collaboration models which overcome the financial and legal issues that come with working together. The Flemish government should explore how best to finance partnerships which encourage information sharing about employment outcomes across organisations. One option would be to allocate funding through strategic objectives, while allowing local partnerships to

collaboratively identify targets and outcomes that will be delivered. Local organisations and agencies already benefit from strong local networking therefore the Flemish government should also examine how to streamline local governance arrangements to fit with broader travel to work areas.

Efforts to encourage joined-up working through shared funding can also improve policy adaptability and ensure programmes reflect local circumstances. While much effort has been made to inject flexibility into the employment system, the Flemish government will need to continue exploring how employment and skills policies are designed to reflect local circumstances. Local areas, such as Antwerp and Limburg can be the first to feel new developments in the labour market and identify emerging issues. Therefore, it is important that vertical accountability structures encourage dialogue between provincial and local organisations to quickly identify and respond to emerging issues, which might not be adequately addressed through existing programme envelopes.

The WIRED initiative from the United States provides a good example of a programme introduced to offset potential issues related to collaboration at the local and regional level. While the initiative has been disbanded, the social capital that was developed from networking among organisations remains an important outcome of the programme within the United States (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Resources for collaboration – example from the United States

WIRED (Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development) was an initiative of the US Department of Labor for the purpose of fostering collaboration among key stakeholders in designated regions and encouraging other activities in order to achieve the following goals:

- Regional Economic Development: Fueling regional economic competitiveness
- Regional Collaboration: Creating highly networked communities that are key to supporting innovation and the economic growth process
- Workforce System Transformation: Developing an integrated approach to workforce and economic development and education
- High-Skill High-Wage Jobs: Expanding employment and advancement opportunities for workers and catalysing the creation of high-skill and high-wage opportunities
- Disadvantaged Populations: Expanding opportunities to increase the work skills and work readiness of low-wage workers.

The US Department of Labor selected 39 regions through a competitive grant process. Each successful region was given up to 15 million USD over a three-year period with an overall outlay of 325 million USD. Each WIRED region determined their own regional boundaries, set their own specific objectives, developed their own strategies and implemented initiatives to meet those objectives based upon their understanding of their assets, challenges and opportunities. Typically, WIRED regions chose specific objectives that aligned workforce investment, economic development, and educational initiatives. Each region could use the grant funding to support their initiatives, and they were expected to leverage those funds with other private and government sources.

Source: OECD (2014e), *Employment and Skills Strategies in the United States*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing.

Recommendation: Continue to collect and share information and data about “what works” locally, including effective approaches to respond to the hiring needs of employers.

Information and evidence play a critical role in bringing local stakeholders together. The ability for local actors and partnerships to identify and respond to the barriers that some people face in getting into employment is shaped by the availability of adequate, timely local level data. Local data can also stimulate effective local partnerships, acting as a catalyst for action (Froy and Giguère, 2010). Authoritative and updated skills profiles of local labour markets are important in framing providers’ strategies and strengthening accountability and can also galvanise local actors into a common agenda for action when used well.

While the collation of data at the sub-national level is strong in Flanders, there is room to improve its interpretation and use in policy-making and programme planning. In Flanders, most analysis is done on past and current trends but analysis on future trends is not comprehensively undertaken, which limits strategic local planning capacity. There are industry bodies which do sector studies, but these are done only for certain sectors and do not necessarily contain an analysis of local impacts. There is a need to continue the work of the existing Policy Research Centre and ensure it focuses on building evidence related to issues that are identified by local actors. The Flemish government could also further develop longitudinal tracking of individuals after course or programme completion. This is not easy to achieve however, with few OECD countries having a successful tracking system in place. Collecting quality data and using it effectively when designing, implementing and evaluating policies is a critical first step.

Going forward, an important policy imperative is developing data sharing platforms across local providers and organisations, which can be used to provide actionable and real time information on gaps in the supply and demand of skills to reduce potential skills shortages. By sharing information across organisations, employment, skills, and economic development actors can ensure they are successfully meeting the hiring needs of employers, which are a critical source of job creation. Box 4.2 provide a comprehensive example from the State of Michigan in the United States of local actors sharing information to better respond to the hiring needs of employers.

Box 4.2. Workforce Intelligence Network in Michigan, United States

WIN provides opportunities for co-ordination, efficiencies, and innovation across partners, by delivering real-time, actionable marketplace intelligence to support better, more efficient solutions for employers. This information helps consortium members, particularly community colleges, make better “real time” decisions regarding skill gaps. One of the tools used by WIN is a methodology to search the internet for job openings and resumes. This information, combined with data from the state’s labor market information and special surveys, are incorporated in strategic plans and operational decisions. For example, SEMCA has been able to act upon this focused information and is currently working to create a talent pool for Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) and Welding. SEMCA also relies on WIN for detailed analysis of specific industries and occupations. Each year it completes a “Region Top Jobs” report, which includes the availability of current and projected opportunities by occupation, with the number of openings, and the rates of pay.

Within the advanced manufacturing sector, WIN connects with various organisations and associations and is leading important initiatives to better align the talent system with

Box 4.2. Workforce Intelligence Network in Michigan, United States (cont.)

talent needs. WIN serves as project lead and fiscal agent for InnoState, a new coalition among WIN, the Detroit Regional Chamber's Connection Point, the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC), the National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS), the Business Accelerators of Southeast Michigan (BANSEM) and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME). Backed by funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and various federal government agencies, InnoState is focused on expanding the New Product Contract Manufacturing Cluster of firms to increase their business and compete globally. WIN also convenes the skilled trades taskforce, which addresses employer talent needs through ongoing dialogue between the talent system and employers looking for skilled trades talent.

In the area of information technology, which is one of the fastest growing sectors in the region, WIN's cluster strategy includes the convening of an employer-led, multi-industry council, which has come to be known as the Tech Council of Southeast Michigan. The Council is convened to raise awareness of and shape community responses to regional talent needs. This group meets routinely and has two primary focuses:

- talent attraction and development; and
- marketing and branding Southeast Michigan as a technology hub.

The Council is comprised of more than 30 employers who have a significant need for information technology talent and is open to any additional company who may be interested in participating. WIN is directly involved with company-led training initiatives like "IT in the D" and serves as a communication conduit for the region's various talent partners. WIN is also working closely with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the state of Michigan, business accelerators, and many others to collaborate and help drive their efforts and programs aimed at closing the IT talent gap in Southeast Michigan.

Source: OECD (2014e), *Employment and Skills Strategies in the United States*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing.

Adding value through skills

Recommendation: Proceed with the reform of the apprenticeship system to make it a more attractive vocational educational pathway and foster more opportunities for work-based training.

The current apprenticeship system in Flanders – based on a “waterfall” model does not provide good training opportunities and is undervalued by both employers and youth. Going forward, it is important that the government examine what changes need to be made to the model to strengthen its attractiveness and ensure it is providing adequate work-based training opportunities, which are linked to quality jobs. A review process should be undertaken to look at its quality and relevance. It should consider expanding the model beyond traditional sectors as well as how to get employers more involved in its implementation and design.

Across the OECD, policy makers are focusing on the importance of providing good quality apprenticeship opportunities as a way of developing skills, which are well connected to the workplace. The benefit of a strong apprenticeship system is that employers become more engaged in articulating their needs and ensuring that the skills being developed align with their industry needs. Furthermore, within the OECD, there

is a general consensus that apprenticeships can ease school to work transitions and lead to better labour market outcomes (Quintini and Manfredi, 2009). The challenge is that many young people still view apprenticeship opportunities as unattractive despite the availability of a high number of well-paying jobs.

In Ontario, Canada, a College of Trades was recently introduced, which is an employer-led body, that advises the government on technical provisions, overall curriculum, as well as policies and regulations. In 2009, legislation was passed to create the College. As an independent, industry-driven body, the College of Trades is designed to raise the profile of the skilled trades. The governance structure of the College includes a diverse range of employer and union representation. It is designed to make the system of apprenticeship training more responsive to the evolving skills and training needs of Ontario employers and consumers (Ontario College of Trades, 2011).

The Ontario government is committed to transforming the delivery of apprenticeship programmes by employing back-to-back education modules, blended and online learning to reduce the time apprentices are away from the workplace and accommodate employer workload priorities, resulting in improved apprenticeship completion. The Ontario government is also looking at enabling apprentices to complete portions of their workplace hours by expanding the in-school component to include real world, living lab work experiences and co-op placements.

Boxes 4.3 and 4.4 provide examples and lessons from apprenticeship programme experiences in the United States and Germany, which may be useful for Flanders in the further development of dual education opportunities.

Box 4.3. Apprenticeship 2000 Programme, United States

The goal of the Apprenticeship 2000 programme is to offer high school students opportunities in technical career fields and employment after graduation. Recognising the need for trained craftsmen, Blum Inc., along with Daetwyler Corporation in 1995, established the Apprenticeship 2000 programme in an effort to train their own workforce. After graduation from the programme, students can earn upwards of \$34 000 per year in their selected career fields.

The Apprenticeship 2000 programme is an 8 000 hour program that spans four years of training. Upon graduation, students earn an AAS degree in Manufacturing Technology, and a Journeymans Certificate awarded by the state of North Carolina. At graduation, each apprentice will have invested approximately 6 400 hours inside one of the six sponsorship companies. The supplemental company instruction reinforces the student's classroom training by taking the classroom examples into real life situations. At Blum, company training is broken into three distinctive categories, each with their own sub categories. The three main categories are: Section One – Basic metal working/ bench work, Section Two – Machining (mill, lathe, CNC) and Section Three – Specialisation.

By training young people in basic machining, applications of engineering, and maintenance, Blum technicians become highly skilled to meet the needs of industry. Graduates of these technical career fields, offered by Apprenticeship 2000, have the ability to design, machine, document, and assemble changes virtually on demand. This makes each person and the company much more flexible to changes in trends, market conditions, and machine performance.

Source: Apprenticeship 2000, available at <http://apprenticeship2000.com/>.

Box 4.4. **Lessons from Germany's Apprenticeship System**

Previous OECD work has looked at the German apprenticeship model and identified the following key lessons for other countries in the development of an effective system:

A more transparent, simpler transition for young people

- Make the apprenticeship route an attractive option for good school performers but also ensure entry mechanisms for weaker school performers.
- Ensure schools have good links with firms and further training and tertiary education institutions, alongside strong career guidance.
- Pre-apprenticeship courses can serve as means to better prepare young people for a vocational route and to integrate more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into apprenticeships.
- Training contracts can be offered to each school leaver with the necessary general skills and who is seeking an apprenticeship. Those not offered an in-company apprenticeship should be offered an recognised alternative by an external provider.

Access to career advancement training

- Supplement initial vocational training with advancement training to enable apprentices to progress to higher level jobs. In addition to specific occupational courses, general components could be included in this training, such as business administration and apprenticeship pedagogy.
- It is critical that advancement courses are certified and fit into national qualification frameworks so that apprentices who complete them can widen their professional prospects and are more mobile in the internal and external labour market.

Broad apprenticeship occupations

- Broader apprenticeship occupations mean more mobility and flexibility for apprentices. They also ensure more transferable skills, meaning workers are less vulnerable to unemployment in the face of an economic slowdown.
- Provide a mix of training for apprentices in joint core competences (such as teamwork) and occupation-specific competences.

Commitment to providing training and safeguarding apprenticeships

- An effective apprenticeship system is dependent on employers being committed to providing training. Agreements between the key social partners at all government levels can be crucial in re-engaging employers, particularly as more seek to reduce training costs following the economic crisis.
- Training pacts at the national, regional and local level can be a good way to ensure involvement by social partners and strong employer representation (e.g. via employers' associations, chambers of commerce, as well as unions and government). These do not necessarily require additional financing.
- Put in place mechanisms to keep apprentices on in times of high unemployment and to provide employment after completion, if even for a limited duration.

Source: Evans, S. and G. Bosch (2012), "Apprenticeships in London: Boosting Skills in a City Economy – With Comment on Lessons from Germany", *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Working Papers*, No. 2012/08, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k9b9mjcxp35-en>.

The government in Flanders could also look at how best to involve employers and vocational education institutions in the development of career pathway approaches, which provide a clear route from secondary school to training and then employment. Generally, pathways approaches are an articulation of knowledge, skills, and competencies and connecting education and work in a set of occupations that move from entry level to more complex positions. Career pathway programmes and initiatives can also have a specific emphasis on low skilled, unemployed or other target populations.

Career pathways approaches are used intensively in the United States and usually involve a partnership between vocational education institutions, secondary schools, employment services, economic development agencies, employers, unions, and other social services providers. The Department of Labour in the United States has played an advocacy role in promoting career pathway approaches as way of filling the need for a better trained workforce. Within the State of Oregon, more than 250 career pathway roadmaps have been created across 17 community colleges (Hamilton, 2012). Pennsylvania has previously used a career pathway model to develop a training programme targeted with the advanced manufacturing sector (see Box 4.5).

Box 4.5. Career pathways/cluster approaches in the United States

Maryland career sectors/clusters: Maryland started working on career sectors/career clusters in 1995 under the School to Work Opportunities Act. Within each county, there is both a Cluster Advisory Board (CAB), and an affiliate for each industry cluster. In Montgomery County, for example, where there is the third largest bio-technology cluster in the United States, they have a CAB is focused on the Biosciences, Health Science and Medicine cluster. The career cluster framework in Maryland is now embedded with flexible pathways. Students are required to take rigorous programmes, and although there are “vocational programmes” in the pathway, students are not short changed in general education.

Administrators, counselors, and faculty members are using the career cluster system to develop programs that extend from high school to two-and four-year colleges/universities, graduate schools, apprenticeship programs and the workplace. Although the cluster framework was originally developed for high schools and young people, it is now being adopted by Workforce Investment Boards and other programs serving adults.

Pennsylvania Mechatronics Partnerships: The Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) of Berks and Lancaster counties in Pennsylvania, United States collaborated to develop the Industrial Maintenance and Mechatronics Industry Partnership of Pennsylvania, also known as the “Mechatronics Partnership”. The region is home to a large base of manufacturing companies. Leading clusters include food manufacturing, wood products and a snack food cluster. Local manufacturers have long faced major challenge in finding skilled workers. Under this programme, local education and training providers collaborate with industry to create training programmes that begin in high school and which can lead to certification through two and four year degrees.

The Mechatronics Partnership has led to a number of positive outcomes, including preparing individuals for a variety of career paths by equipping them with a hybrid mix of skills that are easily transferable. Firms have benefitted from individuals with new mechatronics-related competencies who have introduced new ideas and approaches to the factory floor.

Box 4.5. Career pathways/cluster approaches in the United States (cont.)

The state has supported more than 80 such partnerships across Pennsylvania, engaging more than 6 300 firms. A large portion of the partnerships operate in manufacturing sectors, but there are a number in other clusters, such as logistics or health care. These partnerships are funded through a mix of industry, federal and state investments. They are seen as an example of good practice in the United States and the model has been applied to other states.

Source: Hamilton, V. (2012), "Career Pathway and Cluster Skill Development: Promising Models from the United States", *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Working Papers*, No. 2012/14, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k94g1s6f7td-en>.

Recommendation: Promote stronger engagement with employers in the design and implementation of employment and training programmes to create a culture of lifelong learning. Encourage network formation among employers who can take a lead role in the delivery of employment and skills policies.

Efforts to reduce skills mismatches and shortages require stronger engagement with employers in the facilitation of workplace training opportunities. While there are good examples of collaboration through the sectoral training funds, more can be done to articulate the benefits of training to employers and alert them to the opportunities available through these programmes. Employers complain about work readiness of young people and have high expectations of recruits. The Flemish government should continue to seek ways to develop an employer vision of responsibility to provide lifelong learning opportunities, particularly for lower-skilled individuals who lack access to workplace training opportunities.

The Talent Houses in Antwerp could be given the mandate to look at these policy issues and take a stronger leadership role in promoting workplace training opportunities across employers within their sector. Networking among employers at the local level is critical to leverage resources and funding to stimulate up-skilling opportunities aligned with new areas of economic growth. Some sector bodies, such as retail, host a significant share of poor quality jobs; therefore, they are well-placed to promote a culture of lifelong learning, which can increase overall job quality and labour market outcomes.

In the United Kingdom, the government is currently piloting major changes to the skills funding regime in England through the Employer Ownership Pilot (EOP). This pilot is giving employers direct access to government subsidy for workforce training as opposed to the traditional arrangement whereby all government funding goes direct to colleges and training providers. This means that employers have a direct role in determining the content and delivery of training activities. The second round of the pilot is also testing out the development of new Industrial Partnerships – involving employers, unions and others – with a remit for taking “wider responsibility for skills development in a place or sector”.

Sweden had an apprenticeship system with a poor reputation among employers, therefore, the government sought to create new innovative higher vocational education programmes that use industry representatives and involve a mandatory workplace training component. While somewhat similar to HBO programmes in Flanders, employers in Sweden are more fully involved in determining programme content and delivery (see Box 4.6).

Another issue in Flanders relates to how best to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In many OECD countries, SMEs are the engines of job creation. However

Box 4.6. Higher Vocational Education (Yrkeshögskolan) programmes

In Sweden, Higher Vocational Education (Yrkeshögskolan) is a post-secondary form of education that combines theoretical and practical studies in close co-operation with employers and industry. Programmes are offered in specific fields where there is an explicit demand for competence. These programmes combine theory and practice and workplace training forms an integral part of their delivery. There are hundreds of programmes available across Sweden.

The largest number of programmes offered is in the field of Business Finance and Administration, along with Sales and Manufacturing Technology. Other prominent areas include IT, Hospitality and Tourism, Health Care and Agriculture. Tuition is free of charge and many students are eligible for financial aid from the Swedish National Board for Student Aid (CSN). In order to safeguard the flexibility of the system, programmes can only be given twice and are then automatically terminated. After graduating from an HVE programme, students are qualified to go straight into employment. Standards are set high in HVE programmes. Students are highly goal-oriented, looking to further themselves professionally.

Higher Vocational Education is delivered in co-operation between education providers and those employers and industries affected by the programme. All programmes therefore have a strong emphasis on workplace training. The reason this is a good practice relates to the level of involvement by employers and industry representatives who play a significant role in the planning of HVE programme and their course content. Employers and industry representatives contribute to and influence the programme content by taking part as lecturers, joining in projects, welcoming study visits and by offering work placements.

Source: OECD (2015, forthcoming), Employment and Skills Strategies in Sweden, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing.

they often face different and unique barriers to accessing the employment and skills system. SMEs should be encouraged to provide more up-skilling opportunities to their staff and target them specifically at lower-skilled workers, as it is higher skilled workers who tend to participate in these training opportunities. As highlighted in a previous OECD review of SME policies in Flanders, a first and necessary step for further coaching and support in organising training and development in SMEs is increasing awareness of the importance of training and development for business success (De Vos and Williams, 2011). While there are a number of comprehensive programmes and supports available to SMEs in Flanders, a key issue relates to the lack of awareness of available government support as well as a general reluctance to participate in government programmes because of perceived administrative barriers.

Ireland has emphasised the importance of stimulating networks among SMEs to get them more involved in the employment and skills system (see Box 4.7). In Korea, there are active networks of SMEs that form sectoral associations. These sectoral associations are connected to the local training institutions and arrange training for individuals (OECD, 2014). However, similar to other OECD countries, the challenge with skills training in SMEs is that employers are reluctant to provide training to their employees because of potential worker turnover. To offset such concerns among SMEs, the Ministry of Employment and Labour supports SMEs with training subsidies. For example, SMEs can be reimbursed 100% of the expenses whereas for large firms the upper limit is 80%.

Box 4.7. Promoting ICT through Skillsnet in Ireland

Skillnets was established in 1999 to promote and facilitate workplace training and up-skilling by SMEs. It is the largest organisation supporting workplace training in Ireland. In 2011, it had 70 operational networks through which it trained over 40 000 people for a total expenditure of EUR 25 million. It is a state-funded, enterprise-led body that co-invests with enterprises, particularly SMEs, when they co-operate in networks to identify and deliver training suited to their workforces. A network of SMEs, which are mostly sectoral or regional, is guided by a steering group of the local enterprise representatives. The steering group gives strategic direction and guidance to a network manager who co-ordinates all operational activity leading to the delivery of an agreed training plan with learning interventions suited for the member company workforces. The national programme is co-ordinated by Skillnets Ltd., who contract with all networks and provide programme support and monitoring to ensure the delivery of agreed quantitative and qualitative target outputs.

In 2011, 30 of these networks were located in Dublin, but were predominantly sectoral networks with a national remit and company membership. 25% of all Skillnets member companies and 33% of trainees were Dublin-based. Three networks were specific to the South East region (Carlow Kilkenny Skillnet, South Tipperary Skillnet and Waterford Chamber Skillnet). While Skillnets has a national impact, its influence is largely confined to SMEs which account for 94% of its 10 000 member companies. Originally set up to cater exclusively for the employed, since 2010 Skillnets has a mandate to include the provision of training for jobseekers. This happens both in an integrated manner with jobseekers attending programmes with employees, and also by focusing exclusively on the needs of jobseekers through the provision of dedicated longer-term programmes (e.g. the Jobseeker Support Programme) which includes work placements. Skillnets launched a pilot training initiative, ManagementWorks, providing management training to the SME community with a key focus on owner-managers.

Source: OECD (2014f), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Ireland*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264207912-en>.

Recommendation: Ensure career guidance and information systems are well-targeted to youth and individuals who are unemployed or at-risk of adjustment to support labour force attachment, as well as career progression and advancement.

Individuals require good information and well-articulated pathways to make successful career and labour market transitions. An important aspect to support school to work transitions is ensuring that there is good career guidance for unemployed individuals and students to make labour market and training decisions. In particular for youth, counsellors can play an important role in working with students and parents to define career interests and point individuals towards good training opportunities, which will equip them with the skills they need for labour market success. Box 4.8 provides a good example from Korea, which enables individuals to explore various career opportunities in sectors with strong growth potential.

The impending closure of Ford Genk resulted in a multi-stakeholder approach in Limburg to prepare for the conversion of the region, resulting in the development of the Strategic Action Plan for Limburg. This initiative demonstrates the strong level of partnership working that exists in Flanders with the plan leading to a number of concrete actions designed to respond to the downsizing and negative impacts that it will bring to the local economy. Going forward, individuals impacted by this closure will need targeted

Box 4.8. Career advice in Korea and Canada

Korea Job World is an interactive vocational experience centre located in the city of Seongnam-si in the Gyeonggi-do province, providing career guidance to the public in general, and young people in particular. It consists of an 80 000 square metre, six-story building, offering visitors a unique opportunity to explore and experience various occupations and career opportunities in an interactive way. It is designed to help people obtain a realistic view about possible professional choices and prospects, and to give career advice based on individual interests and aptitude. Visitors are guided through three main halls: The World Hall, Job Experience Hall, and the Career Design Hall. In the World Hall, images and descriptions about typical occupations and their employment trends are provided, whereas in the Job Experience Hall (mainly aimed at children and youth) these can be experienced in realistic settings. Finally, in the Career Design Hall visitors can perform an animated test based on the information and experiences gathered from the other rooms, testing their occupational interests and aptitude and given career advice accordingly. Korea Job World was opened in August 2012 after a period of pilot operation, and now hosts around 3 000 visitors a day.

Hamilton Employment Crawl, Canada: Each year McMaster University, in conjunction with Hamilton employers and supported with labour market information from Workforce Planning Hamilton, organises tours of local companies. “Crawls” are organised by sectors and each crawl involves visiting five enterprises to hear directly from management and staff what is happening in their field as well as upcoming job opportunities. The tours are followed by a networking opportunity with employer participants at a reception hosted by the University (“Employment Crawl”). Recently, four crawls were offered focusing on areas identified by economic development as targeted growth areas for the city. The four fields were:

- Manufacturing/Clean Air and Technology
- Creative Industries and Communications
- Food Processing/Goods Movement and Transportation
- Life Science and Health Care

Source: OECD (2014c), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Korea*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing; Ministry of Employment and Labor (2012), *2012 Employment and Labor Policy in Korea*, Ministry of Employment and Labor, Republic of Korea, p. 43, available at: www.moel.go.kr/english/data/130111_2012_Employment%20and%20Labor%20Policy.pdf; OECD (2014b), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Canada*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264209374-en>.

programmes, which build their skills for new economic opportunities. Flanders could look at other OECD countries’ efforts to respond to large size downsizes.

In the United States, Michigan Shifting Gears is a career-transition programme designed to help seasoned professionals from large corporations develop the skills and training to transition into small company work environments. Initiated by the state of Michigan, it responds to the downsizing of many large corporations in the state, the elimination of professional jobs, and the need to increase entrepreneurship in the state. This programme includes an assessment, comprehensive classroom training, mentorship, coaching, small business simulation and internship with a start-up within a three-month window. By the end of this training, individuals are transformed into more adaptable professionals with experiences, knowledge and skills that are desirable by small, growing and innovative companies.

Many OECD countries are focused on re-activating the unemployed following a downsizing through short-term training opportunities. This “work-first” approach (e.g.

focusing on the shortest route to employment) is important however, one challenge faced by individuals faced with structural adjustment is the lack of longer term training opportunities available, which could better improve their employment outcomes. For unemployed adults or those at-risk of a lay-off, employment and training systems can provide them with a “second chance” by providing longer-term skills development opportunities within new or growing sectors of the economy.

In Ontario, Canada, a skills development programmes (called Second Career Programme) is focused on long-term skills development opportunities to help individuals at risk of displacement transition into new jobs and industries. The objective of the programme is to provide laid-off workers and unemployed individuals with long-term skills training to help them find employment in occupations with demonstrable labour market prospects in Ontario. Those eligible to participate include individuals who have been laid off since 1 January 2005, are unemployed or working an interim job, and are choosing to retrain for a career that is in demand. Individuals are not required to be eligible for unemployment insurance in Canada. The programme provides financial support for tuition, books, travel and other expenses to help eligible workers participate in training programmes. Individuals are eligible to take college training programmes in a range of occupations ranging from plumbers and electricians to community and social service workers, and early childhood educators. Individuals may qualify for financial support of up to CAD 28 000 (OECD, 2014b).

Targeting policy to local employment sectors and investing in quality jobs

Recommendation: Stimulate overall productivity and job quality through policies which promote the better utilisation of skills. Encourage the Talent House to focus on working with employers to stimulate overall demand for skills to boost local growth and competitiveness.

A key aspect of job quality is looking at how individuals are using their existing skills in the workplace. While it is a new area for public policy, skills utilisation approaches can ultimately stimulate overall job creation through greater innovation and productivity improvements. Instead of rapidly designing a training programmes to respond to employers reporting skills shortages, these approaches take a broader workforce development approach by looking at how an organisation is structured as well as the design of jobs within the workplace.

While there are some initiatives undertaken at the local level, particularly in the Limburg region, skills utilisation efforts are not comprehensively supported across Flanders. The Flemish government should encourage closer working with employers to stimulate demand side initiatives under a mantra of Corporate Social Responsibility, which recognises the public and private benefits of encouraging and promoting quality jobs.

The Talent Houses in Antwerp are working well to match skills to certain sectors; however, much of their focus is on supply side initiatives. There is an opportunity for them to shift some of their focus on how to stimulate the demand for skills, which would create higher quality jobs and thereby attract higher skilled people into the city and region, which has broader economic development benefits. The City of Antwerp could look at the Limburg region where there appears to be some interesting programmes, which have sought to improve the better utilisation of skills, such as Platform Care Limburg and practice labs for innovation work organisation. These initiatives also demonstrate the strong role that can be played by unions (e.g. the ACV union) in promoting better quality job opportunities for workers and the unemployed. Their involvement is crucial to ensuring

that any productivity gains from increased employee discretion and problem-solving are passed back to workers in terms of raised salaries and improved working conditions.

Previous OECD research has highlighted the importance of not just building the supply of skills in a local economy but also ensuring that skills are effectively utilised by employers (Froy and Giguère, 2010; Froy, Giguère and Meghnagi, 2012). Skills demand and utilisation will also increase if existing firms are able to diversify, upgrade their product market strategies, and move towards more knowledge-intensive production processes. As companies move into higher value added product and service markets, the levels of skills that they require, and the extent to which they utilise skills, tends to increase. There are a number of tools that can be used to support better work organisation and skills utilisation in order to increase productivity while improving job quality (see Box 4.9).

Box 4.9. What practices promote more effective skills utilisation?

The Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (now mainstreamed within the Department of Industry) has outlined the following types of initiatives designed to make the use of skills more effective:

- **Job redesign:** involves changing the role or description of a job so that the skills of the employee are put to better use. This can include teamwork and flexibility in job descriptions and work arrangements with colleagues.
- **Employee participation:** includes involving employees in discussion on business strategy, which aims to more effectively use employees' knowledge and experience.
- **Autonomy:** includes giving employees more freedom and autonomy to make decisions in how they perform their job.
- **Job rotation:** involves facilitating the learning of new skills by shifting employees into different jobs and positions within the company.
- **Skills audit** (training needs assessment): aims to identify the skills that employees currently have and identify which skills are most needed.
- **Multi-skilling:** is related to job rotation and involves training employees in multiple skill sets, which enables them to perform other tasks, which are not included in their job description.
- **Knowledge transfer:** these types of initiatives can include developing new skills and training that is related to work or working with experienced workers to develop mentorships opportunities for younger staff.

Source: Skills Australia (2012), *Better Use of Skills, Better Outcomes: A Research Report on Skills Utilisation in Australia*, www.awpa.gov.au/publications/documents/Skills-utilisation-research-report-15-May-2012.pdf.

The vocational education and training system in Flanders can also play a prominent role in working closer with employers to undertake applied research, which improves production and business performance processes. They can also be instrumental in helping local industries to better access and better utilise skills when they are fully embedded in local economies. In areas of traditional low-skills, low-wage employment, the role played by vocational training system colleges in stimulating innovation in the local economy would seem to be particularly important. This can help local companies tap into relevant supply chains and expand their export opportunities to existing and emerging markets across Europe and the globe. Flanders could look at interesting workforce development initiatives, which have been introduced in Australia and Korea (see Box 4.10) to stimulate better quality jobs.

Box 4.10. Improving work organisation in Australia and Korea

Skills Connect, Australia: Skills Connect is a new approach to integrate workforce development programmes and services and to make them widely accessible to businesses. It provides access to programmes and funding via a national network of advisers, who provide support and advise about workforce development issues. This includes workforce planning, as well as attracting, retaining and developing employees. The specific programmes include support for Australian apprentices, literacy, language and numeracy training and assistance with developing or improving the skills of employees. At this stage, the National Workforce Development Fund is the principal component of Skills Connect. This programme assists businesses to identify and address their current and future workforce development needs by subsidising the training of new and existing workers. So far, \$700 million AUD has been allocated to this fund for the period 2011-12 to 2015-16.

Techno parks in Korea to boost business innovation within SMEs: Bucheon (which is a suburb west of the capital city of Seoul) has several techno-parks which are business incubation buildings that accommodate many SMEs. These centres aim at attracting firms and improving working conditions in order to create job opportunities. The Techno Parks provide services to enhance SMEs' business administration capabilities. When SMEs need to accelerate their scale of business activities, they need the detailed information and knowledge about finance, marketing and management. To support them, the Techno Parks provide services to enhance their business administration capabilities; for example, exploring overseas markets, operating show rooms, hosting Design Contests, and arranging international certification supports. As global marketing environments are changing rapidly, the Techno Parks run classes for CEOs to enhance their skills for business administration and decision making. Also, there are more specialised education programmes such as outplacement start-up education and seminars for technology protection.

Source: OECD (2014c), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264207899-en>; OECD (2014d), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Korea*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264216563-en>.

Recommendation: Build stronger entrepreneurship skills for youth and adults to stimulate overall demand and job creation. This can be done by promoting entrepreneurship as a viable career option and providing comprehensive support and tools to individuals to help them start their own business.

Another critical level in stimulating job creation locally is creating a culture of entrepreneurship. This is particularly true for local areas which are experiencing structural adjustments, such as the Limburg region, where the Ford factory is set to close, resulting in significant direct and indirect job losses for the community.

Entrepreneurship skills can assist individuals in developing successful businesses and creating jobs. In particular, the vocational and higher education system should ensure that course curriculum includes an adequate focus on building these types of skills. For under-represented groups, previous OECD research has highlighted the benefits of encouraging entrepreneurship among these individuals to stimulate overall labour supply as well as job creation (OECD, 2013).

More can be done in Flanders to promote entrepreneurship as a viable career option for youth by giving them better support to start their own business. There is evidence that young people are enthusiastic about starting businesses (including non-profits) but they

face greater barriers due to lower levels of skills, less experience, more difficulty accessing financing, and less developed business networks. More should be done to support the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills by youth by embedding entrepreneurship teaching throughout the education system, providing information, advice, coaching and mentoring, facilitating access to financing, and offering support infrastructure for business start-up.

Box 4.11. Promoting Entrepreneurship following Structural Adjustment in Canada

Entrepreneurial activity is seen as one of the keys to diversifying the local economy of Shawinigan. For many years, Shawinigan was an industrial town built around its large electric power facility and heavy industry. Industrialization brought steady well-paying work in forestry, aluminium production and textiles. The city became a victim of structural changes in the global economy with many employers shutting down their operations. With the impending closure of another enterprise in 2009, prominent people in the community were brought together to look at the future of city considering its strengths and weaknesses. Based on this collaboration, the city is pursuing an approach that looks to develop a community of entrepreneurs and small business operations as a sustainable economic base.

What is of particular interesting about this approach is the partnership of a number of different actors each guided by a different policy focus (e.g. economic development, education or employment) to implement a local horizontal approach. The mechanism for this integration was a small amount of funding directed to the municipality by a departing employer.

A Diversification Committee was established composed of key funding and government agencies. The committee realised that in order to be effective, they would have to create a common local plan that would inform their vertical accountabilities. Specific areas of collaboration have been the strategic use of non-governmental and governmental funding to maximize total grants. An entrepreneurial forum was created to:

- promote entrepreneurship as a career;
- increase the percentage of individuals choosing an entrepreneurial path;
- develop entrepreneurial attributes among the youth;
- grow synergies among organizations that develop the economy and community; and,
- recognize and emphasize initiative, creativity, solidarity and communal engagement.

In collaboration with the school commission, Shawinigan opened the entrepreneurship centre in 2013. It represents a unique project in the province of Québec positioned in that it is a tangible action brought about by the entrepreneurial forum with the collaboration of the Diversification Committee.

The entrepreneurship centre is located in an old textile factory which has been completely renovated. The city of Shawinigan advanced \$3 million for the project with approximately \$2 million coming from other sources. The entrepreneurship centre offers skills development programmes along with other supports that will allow the growth of a critical mass of entrepreneurs.

Source: OECD (2014b), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Canada*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264209374-en>.

Being inclusive

Recommendation: Strengthen linkages between the education system and employment, and training agencies to reduce youth drop-outs. Continue to target early-school leavers and provide follow-up support while examining ways of involving youth more in programme design and delivery.

To ensure that the supply of skills adequately meets labour market demand, it is important to strengthen the linkages between the education system and employment, and training agencies. Schools should work more closely with VDAB and the vocational education system to create clearer, simpler and more recognised pathways into training as well as the labour market. In particular, it is important that more out-reach is conducted by VDAB and other partners with secondary schools to ensure that youth at-risk can be identified early and adequate supports and interventions can be put in place to reduce early school leavers and the number of NEETs. At the local level, addressing youth unemployment is a clear policy priority in both Antwerp and Limburg. A number of comprehensive programmes and policies have been put in place, including a strategy to target early school leavers and provide them with work experience opportunities to develop long-term labour market attachment. Furthermore, there is a strong policy focus on improving transitions from school to work.

Efforts in this area must continue as previous OECD research has shown that youth who drop out of school early, having acquired no or few qualifications, are at particular risk of becoming permanently disconnected from the labour market (OECD, 2013). In the past, the higher availability of employment meant that those who had not completed compulsory education could pass easily into employment, albeit often poor quality and temporary, but the decreasing number of job openings has made this harder. To be most effective, policy makers need to improve mechanisms for identifying those at risk of dropping out, and prevent this from happening.

When young excluded people start work, it is important that follow-up support is provided to ensure they are gradually building basic employability skills. Providing on-going support and training once young people are in work to help them retain their employment and secure on-going career progression is also important (OECD, 2014b). This support will help ensure sustainable employment and the skills necessary to retain a job or re-enter the labour market if faced with a lay-off.

The development of employability skills through workplace training opportunities is an important component of the BladeRunners programme in Vancouver, Canada where youth receive health and safety training to help them build self-esteem and confidence. Support from programme co-ordinators is a key defining feature of this model (see Box 4.12). Off-the-job support takes many forms: referrals to various health, education and social services; financial support for obtaining stable housing; support in the form of public transport vouchers and meals; informal counselling about further training and education; and financial support for additional training programme fees. The underlying and fundamental goal of all support is to make sure that participants are able to be placed in jobs and to maintain stable employment and long-term attachment to the labour market.

The Ontario government in Canada has recently announced a new Youth Employment Strategy in its recent 2013 Budget. This strategy is designed to help more young people find jobs, while also ensuring the employers can hire the skilled workers they need in today's economy. The entire strategy is supported by a total investment of \$295 million CDN over

Box 4.12. **BladeRunners, Canada**

BladeRunners is an employment programme that helps youth (ages 15-30) with multiple barriers to employment build careers in construction and other industries throughout the province of British Columbia, Canada. The ultimate goal of the program is to develop skills and work experience that foster long-term attachment to the labour force and to support the social and community integration of young people.

All BladeRunners programme participants are paired up with one of the BladeRunners co-ordinators. This is not done through an assignment process, but rather follows the preferences of participants and their choice to engage with one or another of the co-ordinators. Co-ordinators provide support directly if possible, or through their network of contacts in community organisations. Most programme co-ordinators have a history in the community and have often encountered in the past some of the same difficulties faced by BladeRunners participants. Prior to placement, all work equipment (hard hats, boots, rain gear, etc.) is paid for by the BladeRunners programme and participants are accompanied by a co-ordinator in order to make this purchase. Then, on the first day of work, a BladeRunners co-ordinator will bring the participant to the construction site and introduce him or her to the foreman, contractor or tradesperson, and to other BladeRunners if any are already working on the site. Over the subsequent days, the co-ordinator will return to the site to ensure that the contractor, the tradespeople and the BladeRunners participant are satisfied with the placement. If required, co-ordinators will refer participants to other social service providers, assist with housing and transport needs and counsel young people about further training and permanent job opportunities. Funds are available to help stabilise housing (first month's rent and damage deposit), for transport (bus tickets) and food (lunches on site, if needed) – this support is offered because it is deemed essential to ensure employability.

Support is offered whenever programme participants need it, on or off the job. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. BladeRunners participants all have the mobile phone number of “their” co-ordinator who can be reached at all times. Although emergency calls are rare, they do occur and co-ordinators are willing to provide any useful assistance at these times. In the past, access to support from co-ordinators was offered only up to 18 months after placement. However, in practice, programme co-ordinators always maintained an open-door policy and continued to engage with any past BladeRunners participants who expressed a need for support in returning to employment. Today, no time limits are placed on the availability of support.

Source: Travkina, Froy and Pyne (2013), “Local Strategies for Youth Employment: Learning from Practice”, OECD *Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED)*, available at www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Local%20Strategies%20for%20Youth%20Employment%20FINAL%20FINAL.pdf.

two years, and is estimated to create 30 000 new job opportunities. The strategy focuses on jobs, entrepreneurship and innovation for youth in Ontario and includes new programmes, which provide hiring incentives to employers to offer young people in all regions of the province an entry point to long-term employment. An Ontario Youth Entrepreneurship Fund has also been set up to support the next generation of entrepreneurs through mentorship, startup capital and outreach supports. Flanders could look to this strategy in further developing actions around tackling youth unemployment.

Flanders could also look at involving youth more in the delivery of youth employment programmes using a principle of co-design, where youth are actively involved in making a programme successful. This principle of co-design goes beyond an advisory role and

directly involves youth in the delivery of the programme. For example, Sweden has recently introduced the Unga-In project, which takes an innovative approach to assisting youth by directing involving young people as staff (see Box 4.13). This helps to build credibility and ensure that at-risk youth can interact with role models, who can help to show them the benefits of a sustainable job.

Box 4.13. Sweden: The Unga In Project

Unga In (meaning young in) is a project to fight youth exclusion from the labour market. The project targets drop-outs who are not participating in employment or skills programmes. The goal of the project is to give young people greater ambition and motivation to participate in the labour market. The risk is that they would otherwise be permanently excluded, with consequences for themselves and for society in general.

The project is an outgrowth of a well-established organization called *Fryshuset*, after the storage house (“the freezing house”) where they are located in Stockholm. *Fryshuset* was set up with the intention to provide a space for young people. *Fryshuset* is a partner in the project, together with the city of Stockholm and the organisation Friends, which runs programmes in schools to prevent social conflicts. The project *Unga In* is owned by *Arbetsförmedlingen* and co-funded by the European Social Fund.

Unga In provides basic services by *Arbetsförmedlingen*, to help youth find motivating education and job opportunities. What makes it different is how it approaches the target group through its outreach activities. Project staff are other young people and therefore can establish greater trust with the participants. Participants meet with staff in a “job garage” where there are provided with counselling and mentoring opportunities in a more informal setting.

Source: OECD (2015, forthcoming), *Employment and Skills Strategies in Sweden*, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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From:
**Employment and Skills Strategies in Flanders,
Belgium**

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264228740-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2015), "Towards an action plan for jobs in Flanders, Belgium: Recommendations and best practices", in *Employment and Skills Strategies in Flanders, Belgium*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264228740-8-en>

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