

PRESS RELEASE

June 2025

Report to the Flemish Parliament

Bridging programmes in higher education

The range of bridging programmes to enable flexible progression to a master's programme is well-founded, but students cannot easily find an overview of all their bridging options. Bridging programmes prepare well for the master's programmes, but are quite difficult. Students receive insufficient information about the study load involved.

Bridging programme's supply

For students wanting to follow a master's programme that doesn't directly follow on from their bachelor's programme, a bridging programme is one of the options for a shorter transition to the master's programme. A Bridging programme is available for approximately one third to slightly more than half of the initial master's programmes. Feasibility is the decisive supply factor: can a student be taught the initial competencies needed for the master's programme within a maximum package of 90 credits (approximately 1.5 academic years)? The decision thereabout is usually well-founded.

The institutions themselves determine which professional bachelor's courses are granted access to the master's programme via the bridging programme. Not every institution considers the same admission requirement to be feasible or desirable. This can lead to major differences in the scope of admission requirements, even for the same bridging programme. If less related professional bachelor's programmes are admitted, bridging programmes can take longer and it can be difficult to offer a coherent programme within 90 credits. Universities of applied sciences usually aren't structurally consulted regarding the substantive composition of the bridging programme. There is no central overview allowing students to explore their progression options based on their own situation.

Reach of target groups

Approximately half of the students in bridging programmes come from general secondary schools and only a third of them come from technical secondary schools. The bridging student's population therefore doesn't completely reflect the potential flow-through population: a certain selection effect continues to play a role. Only the working student's share is significantly higher among bridging students than among bachelor programmes. Whether more disadvantaged groups also flow through to a master programme via bridging programmes cannot be evaluated: despite earlier intentions, government does not yet centrally register all indicators for disadvantaged groups.

Difficulty and success of bridging programmes

The study return in bridging programmes (an average of 66%) is only slightly higher than the one in bachelor's programmes, while bridging students have already successfully obtained a diploma. In addition, approximately one third leaves the bridging programme without a certificate, which is significantly higher than in master's programmes. In the

programmes examined, a relatively large proportion of bridging students only obtained their bridging programme certificate one year later than the standard duration. A positive aspect is that bridging students who obtain a certificate do well in the master's programme.

Students receive insufficient information about a bridging programme's study difficulty. Credits sometimes appear not to realistically represent actual study times required for a bridging programme. University organised activities specifically for bridging students, greatly promote the student's academic and social integration.

Collaboration between institutions

For some programmes, mobility between professional bachelor's programmes and bridging programmes is promoted by a specific form of collaboration between universities and colleges: students can take an elective course as part of their professional bachelor's programme that is also part of the university bridging programme. In this way, they can start the bridging programme better informed and reduce the size of the programme.

Response from the Minister

In her response, the Flemish Minister of Education stated that the report's analysis, conclusions and recommendations provide useful insights into the accessibility, effectiveness and structural challenges of bridging programmes. The minister acknowledges both the positive report findings and the challenges raised.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The report *Bridging programmes in higher education* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full version and this press release can be found on the Court's website: www.courttofaudit.be.