

# Using research on diversity and inclusion to work on policy change and sensitizing staff

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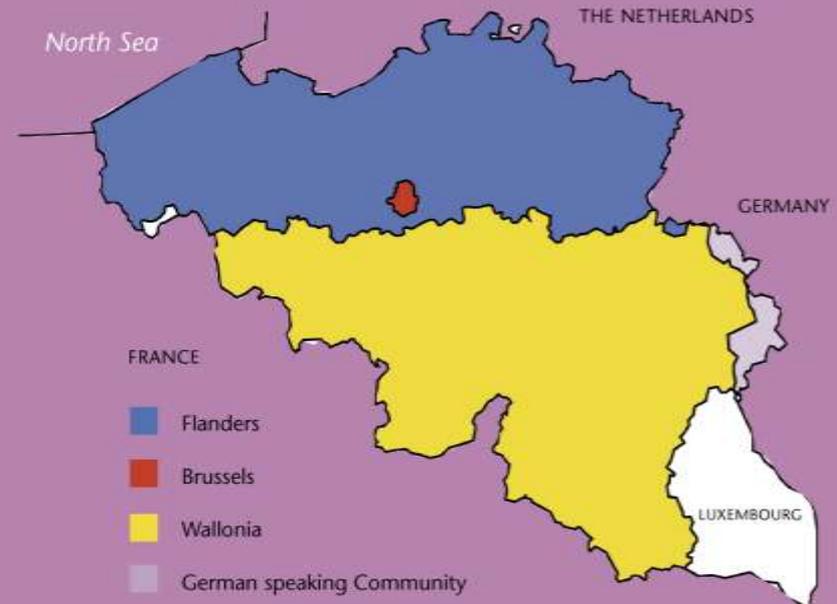
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# OVERVIEW

- HE in Belgium / Flanders
- Howest University College
- Research ‘Diversity and inclusion - action through interaction’
- Quotes – students & staff
- Conclusions

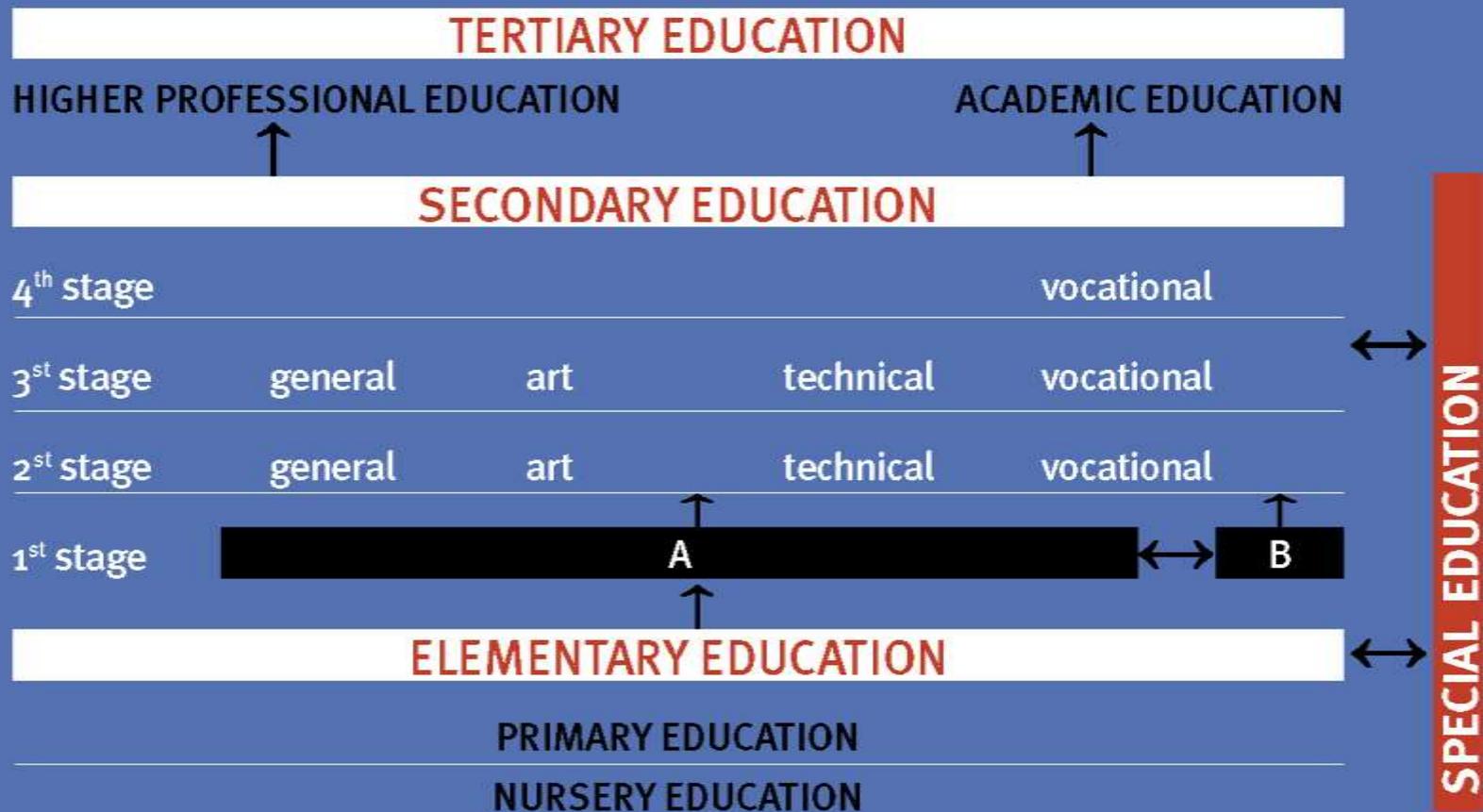


# Flanders as a federated state



- **Flemish Region:** territorial issues
- **Flemish Community:** person-related issues
- 1 Flemish Parliament and 1 Flemish Government

# Structure of education



# HE in Flanders

- No enrollement examination
- Everyone with a high school diploma can register in HE in any study field (actual discussion about orientation procedure)
- About 40% of students don't make it to 3rd semester
- Legislation concerning HE finances: in/through/output > more focus on student guidance

## Howest University College

- Two cities: Bruges & Kortrijk
- +/- 6000 students
- Professional bachelor programmes
- Student Guidance Dpt: educational support, diversity policy and student services

# Research 'action through interaction'

## STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

- 35 students who experienced a 'need for support'
- Semi-structured interviews
- A very diverse group...

## STAFF PERSPECTIVE

- 16 programme teams
- 3 'diversity actors' teams
- 19 focus group interviews
- 3 main questions:
  - What is diversity to you?
  - What are your experiences?
  - What are your needs?

- Action research
- Focus on **good practices**
  - Aim to inspire others
  - But what are good practices??
- “Disability studies”:
  - give students chances for inclusion and belonging;
  - consider diversity as a positive thing;
  - start from talents, and not from deficits;
  - look for opportunities and not for barriers;
  - practices should be about the right to support for students, and not about favours.

- **Goals of the research project:**
  - scientifically underpin and support the further **development of the diversity policy** by using **action research**
  - **developing tools** that the inflow, throughflow and outflow of disadvantaged groups to support them

*We are so mini, mini society hey, in  
our students, (...)*

# POLICY ADVICE #1

- EDUCATION IS PART OF SOCIETY...
- CONTRIBUTE!



**“There are some classes where I sit in front and the other students are not sitting that far away, but yet I don’t sit with them. I find it important to sit in the group”**

# POLICY ADVICE #2

WHEN BUILDING NEW  
INFRASTRUCTURE:  
THINK 'UNIVERSAL  
DESIGN'!





[www.GreatBuildings.com](http://www.GreatBuildings.com)

[howest.be](http://howest.be)

**howest**  
De Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen  
Lid van de Associatie Universiteit Gent

*“I always wanted to do something with psychology and I was interested in applied psychology. And I informed myself here [at this university college]. They never told me: you shouldn’t do that, but they said: we use a lot of tests and it is very visually, and they were very honest: look, we think it is not that realistic. I was so glad that they were honest.”*

*“I asked it to several teachers, and they said to me that it was not realistic. They said: you won’t be able to combine this programme with work. And ok... It’s tough. But I take one class less and it’s attainable.”*

**“The only problem I had, was that they draw on big drawing tables and I couldn’t do that. And then the school said: do you have a computer? You can draw with the computer!”**

*“I think, if a student has a clear, psychological diagnose, you should be able to tell that someone with autism shouldn’t study social work.”*

**“Our mandate is to bring in as much students as possible”**

# POLICY ADVICE #3

- LET STUDENTS CHOOSE ACCORDING TO THEIR TALENTS AND INTEREST.
- > interest stimulates motivation
- BE HONEST BUT HAVE AN OPEN VIEW TOWARDS ALTERNATIVES.
- THINK CREATIVELY!



“What immediately attracted my attention, was that the form I needed, already was included in the student package. I didn’t had to go asking for it somewhere. That can be a barrier, especially when it’s a new place, a new college...”

# POLICY ADVICE #4

- **MAKE SUPPORT LOW THRESHOLD**  
(e.g. mentoring; 'the dot')
- **COMMUNICATE SUPPORT INCLUSIVELY**



“Are there boundaries to a diversity policy? The only thing I can say about that, is that a diversity policy shouldn’t say that everyone is capable for a certain programme. Because you can’t deny that there are certain requirements for a professional context.”



**“Communication... I’m not that good at that. So I want to train that and I chose an education programme which focuses on communication skills.”**

# POLICY ADVICE #5

THINK ABOUT THE  
GOALS OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION!



RETHINK  
'EMPOYABILITY' ...

## HOWEST U - MISSION STATEMENT

- *Howest University College is an atypical, creative, innovative and enterprising college. Anticipating the future, **from the talent and motivation of each student**, Howest trains professionals who are competent, immediately deployable and team oriented. Howest is a leader in its socially relevant, practical teaching, research and service oriented at valorisation for broad regional and international field. Howest is **an open and pluralistic university**, with **respect for diversity**. Howest inspires her students and staff to integrate its core values in their personal and professional lives.*

# PEDAGOGICAL VISION

(...)

***Talent-oriented and activating teaching with maximum guidance***

*The training program is consistent with the competencies of incoming students belonging to the target audience of the programme. Howest organizes its education in an inclusive manner, has an eye for the talents of its students and challenges them to participate actively.*

(...)

# CONCLUSION

- Action research was the way to go!
- Howest University College has implemented conclusions in mission statement en vision on how to support students. But still a long way to go...



# CONCLUSION

- Focus on the first year experience: orientation, induction, engagement, guidance, personal development.
- Ideas:
- Integrating ‘mentoring’ in Personal Development Modules + support for ‘mentors’
  - Talent oriented courses can motivate students