

COGNITIVE TALENT UNDER PRESSURE:

challenges and opportunities for Flemish education

**Franzis Preckel
Lianne Hoogeveen
Joos Vandewalle
Lieven Verschaffel**



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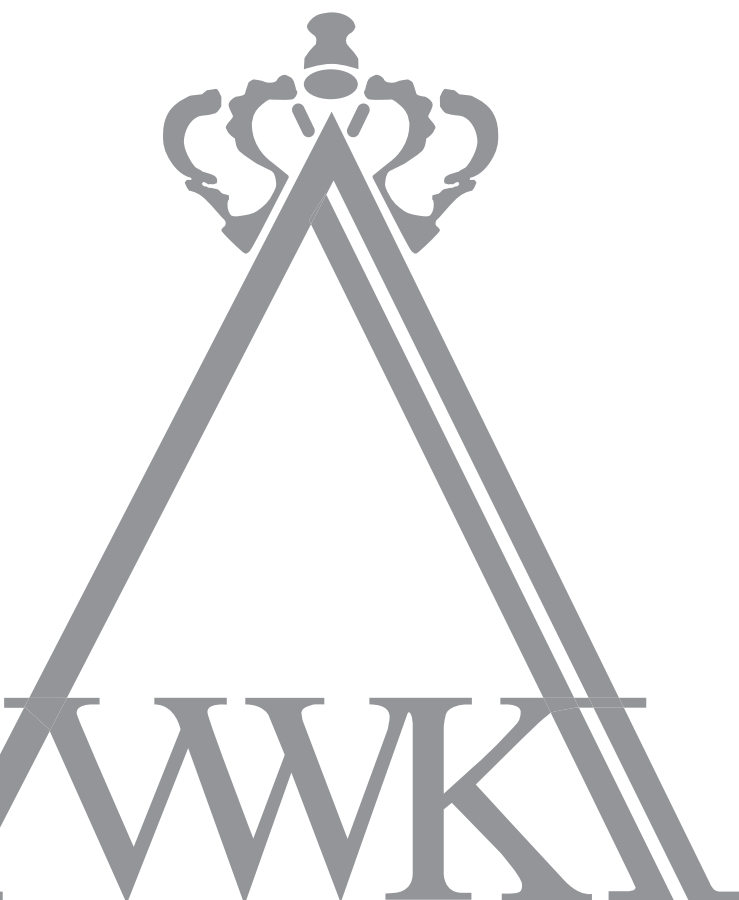
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Lianne Hoogeveen
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Foreword

"The Position Papers series, of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (KVAB), contributes to a scientifically based debate on current social and artistic themes. The authors, members and working groups of the Academy write in their own name, independently and with complete intellectual freedom. Approval for publication by one or more Classes of the Academy guarantees the quality of the text. This Position Paper, in the original Dutch version, was approved for publication by the Class of Humanities (KMW) and the Class of Technical Sciences (KTW) of the KVAB on 18 December 2025."

In a recent column in *De Tijd* Emily Rammant wrote: "In Belgium, cognitively strong learners do not receive the treatment that top-level sports get. Giftedness is still too often seen as a luxury issue, which means that talent is not systematically recognized or supported. The result is predictable: children and youngsters get bored, drop out, choose a study that is too simple or move abroad. The social costs are large, but remain invisible," <https://ap.lc/InIsR>.

In order to make a substantial contribution to the practice and policy of the educational care for CSF (CSF) learners in Flanders, the KVAB organized a Thinkers' Cycle on this theme in 2024-25. This cycle was coordinated by two Thinkers, namely Prof. Dr. Franzis Preckel (chair holder of giftedness research and guidance in the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Trier) and Prof. Dr. Lianne Hoogeveen (endowed professor of 'Identification, Support and Counseling of Talent' at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands), together with Prof. Em. Joos Vandewalle (member of the Class of Technical Sciences of the KVAB), Prof. Em. Lieven Verschaffel (member of the Class of Human Sciences of the KVAB), Prof. Karine Verschueren (professor of school psychology at KU Leuven and director of the interuniversity expertise center TALENT) and KVAB staff member Inez Dua. This coordination team was assisted by a large steering group of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who are directly or indirectly involved in the theme of the Thinkers' Cycle, and of members of the KVAB and the Young Academy (see Appendix 1).

The aim of this Thinkers' Cycle was to gain a better understanding of all aspects of the attention and care for cognitively strongly functioning (CSF) children and youngsters in Flemish education and society at large, and to formulate recommendations based on these insights to improve the policy and practice of education and the broader care for CSF children and youngsters in Flanders.

As part of this Thinkers Program, two visits by the Thinkers were organized in the spring of 2025. During these visits, a number of schools were visited and numerous discussions took place with all kinds of categories of experts and stakeholders:

- Researchers active in the field of CSF, as well as in related research domains,
- Primary and secondary school teachers responsible for the implementation and/or coordination of their school's policy with regard to CSF learners,
- Responsible for educational programs, learner support and teacher training at higher education institutions,

- Representatives of learner guidance centers (centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding), learning support centers (leersteuncentra), and educational support centers (pedagogische begeleidingsdiensten) ¹,
- Employees of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, the cabinet of the Flemish Minister of Education, the Flemish Education Inspectorate, and education experts of the European Union,
- Administrators of the Flemish education networks,
- Representatives of the Flemish Pupils' Association (Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel) and the Flemish Students' Association (Vlaamse Vereniging Studenten),
- Representatives of private centers for the diagnosis and guidance of CSF children and youngsters,
- (Board) members of associations for (exceptionally) gifted children and youngsters and/or their parents, as well as individual parents,
- Heads of Flemish institutions for policy- and practice-oriented educational research (OBPWO, Leerpunt).

The well-attended closing symposium took place on 11 June 2025 at the Palace of the Academies in Brussels. Based on the collected material, the discussions held, the meetings with the steering committee, and the feedback during the final symposium, the two Thinkers drew up a draft of their final report (<https://kvab.be/nl/denkersprogramma/denkersprogramma-zorg-voor-talent>).

The massive willingness to participate in the visits and discussions organized in the context of the Thinkers' Cycle and the large turnout for the concluding final symposium testify to the great social importance of the theme. That is why the KVAB considered it appropriate to dedicate one of its annual KVAB Position paper to this theme starting from this Thinkers' Cycle. We hope that this Position paper will contribute to a greater social awareness of the importance of the theme and a more coherent, vigorous and research-based educational care for and interaction with CSF children and youngsters in Flemish education and society at large.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed directly or indirectly to this Position paper. First of all, we would like to express our gratitude to all those who have contributed to the successful Thinkers' Cycle that forms the starting point of this KVAB Position paper: the members of the steering committee, the numerous experts and stakeholders with whom discussions were held, the directors and teachers of the schools we visited, the panel members who reflected on the findings and reflections of

¹ Learner guidance centers (centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding) provide free, independent, and confidential assistance to learners, parents, and schools in primary and secondary education with learning difficulties, study choices, psychological and social problems such as bullying, problems at home, and fear of failure. It also monitors the health of students. Learning support centers (leersteuncentra) provide support for learners with specific educational needs in mainstream primary and secondary education, which go beyond what the school already is able to offer in terms of broad basic care and increased care, as well as for their teachers. The pedagogical guidance centers (pedagogische begeleidingsdiensten) have the task of strengthening the policies of schools and centers, and of promoting the professionalization of the teaching staff.

the Thinkers during the final symposium as well as those who reflected on their 'good practice' of Educational interaction with CSF learners have testified, as well as the staff members for organizational and technical support. Finally, we would like to address a special word of thanks to Prof. Karine Verschueren (KU Leuven) for sharing her expertise on CSF and her contacts with relevant actors and organizations in Flanders in this field, both in the preparation and realization of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle and of this resulting Position paper, and to Mrs. Inez Dua (KVAB) for her enormous commitment and help throughout the process.

Summary

The number of top performers for mathematics among Flemish 15-year-olds decreased from 34.3% to 15.0% between 2003 and 2022. (Trends PISA 2022 – Flemish report)

Highly gifted learners are finding it increasingly difficult to find their place in a school system that is tailored to the average learner. (Dirk Van Damme in Emancipation, excellence and fair opportunities, 2023)

As a gifted learner, you don't want to be different from the rest of the class; you want to belong to the group. Make education for gifted people as normal as possible and fight the stigma of being 'the teacher's darling'. (Representatives of high school learners, KVAB Thinkers' Cycle)

In Belgium, cognitively strong learners do not receive the treatment that top-level sporters get. Giftedness is still too often seen as a luxury issue. (Emily Rammant, De Tijd, 21 November 2025)

These headlines point to missed opportunities for the talent development of CSF learners in our Flemish society. The KVAB has taken the initiative to invite two internationally renowned experts for a thinker's cycle about this socially important theme, around which there are many taboos and misunderstandings. During a year of intense cooperation, these experts, together with a steering committee consisting of members of the KVAB and experts from the research institutions in Flanders, have conducted an in-depth cooperative investigation of the Flemish state-of-the-art, through consultation with the numerous stakeholders from primary, secondary, and higher education, teacher training, educational policy, research, educational support and assistance agencies, and associations of parents of CSF children and youngsters. This Position paper contains the findings, insights, conclusions and recommendations that have emerged from this thinkers' cycle. Below is a summary of its most important elements.

In a society that places high demands on knowledge, innovation and critical thinking, recognizing and supporting cognitive diversity is a core task for education. Within this diversity, CSF learners – often referred to as gifted learners – occupy a special place. They have special cognitive abilities, but, as with other learners, this potential often does not develop to its full potential. To discover and realize this potential, cognitively strong learners also need opportunities, encouragement and help that match their specific

learning possibilities and needs. The Flemish educational landscape therefore faces the challenge of creating a caring, knowledge-rich and challenging learning environment for them as well in which they can develop optimally.

Although Flanders has a strong tradition of high-quality and caring education, recent studies and practical experiences show that CSF learners still often fall between the cracks. Their cognitive potential and associated educational needs are not always recognized, they sometimes prefer to stay under the radar themselves and therefore perform - sometimes far - below their abilities. If they are detected at school and receive support, it often depends on individual teachers or on individual and temporary initiatives. As a result, there remains a gap between potential and realization, resulting in all kinds of negative side effects for these learners, such as psychological and/or physical complaints, underachievement, demotivation, truancy and school dropout.

The educational interaction with CSF learners is more than a pedagogical challenge for the benefit of individual children and youngsters; It is also an essential social task. Inclusive education policies that recognize and support cognitive strength in children and youngsters, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, contributes substantially to social cohesion and equity and ensures overall sustainable social progress.

Scientific insights show that cognitive strength manifests itself in many forms, and, as in the general population, is accompanied by a wide range of personal characteristics. Contrary to what is often claimed, there is no scientific evidence for a link between cognitive giftedness and personal traits such as overexcitability, sensitivity, fear of failure, mental health... The social-emotional needs of cognitively strong children and youngsters can therefore differ considerably, which means that a uniform educational approach is inappropriate.

In order to optimally support CSF children and youngsters, timely and proper identification is of the utmost importance. This is often lacking. In particular, learners with high potential who do not perform well at school are often overlooked, both by their parents and by their teachers, and therefore do not receive the (timely) encouragement and support needed for the development of their talent. Children and youngsters with a low socioeconomic status and/or a migrant background, or whose potential lies in academically less dominant fields, and girls are less noticed. When identifying high potential in learners, it is important to first provide them with sufficient opportunities to explore and express their potential, especially if they have vulnerable background characteristics.

Good support for CSF learners requires a positive and inclusive educational climate in which cognitive diversity is recognized and valued and in which false contradictions between striving for equal opportunities and excellence or between focusing on good learning performance and well-being are bridged. In addition, there is a need for adaptive learning pathways with accelerating, enriching, and deepening learning opportunities for the cognitively stronger ones, both within and outside the regular classroom and school context. International research shows that all these measures can be effective for CSF learners, both in terms of their cognitive learning and their social and emotional

development. Moreover, no single educational measure or approach turns out to be the miracle solution for every CSF learner. Most CSF learners benefit from a flexible alternation or combination of these support models.

Over the past decade, the attention paid to CSF in Flanders has increased considerably, both in terms of research, policy and practice of education. An important breakthrough came in 2020, when the Flemish Government invested specifically and substantially in education and care for CSF learners for the first time. Twelve anchor schools were selected that had the task of professionalizing other schools in CSF and helping them to develop and implement their educational approach of CSF learners. The Talent Expertise Center was selected to support these anchor schools in evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions, to coordinate the development of professional networks with other schools, and to carry out and disseminate scientific research on CSF. This governmental CSF Support Policy was extended in 2023 until 2028 and expanded by 8 additional anchor schools. In the meantime, fruitful contacts and collaborations have been built up with learner guidance centers, learning support centers, educational support centers, teacher training institutes, the education inspectorate, private advice and support centers for CSF children and youngsters, associations for gifted people, etc. Although the project is positively evaluated and shows an impact on the CSF policy of participating schools, it still reaches a minority of Flemish schools for primary and secondary education. In order to safeguard the achievements and to allow the CSF network to continue to grow, further governmental support will continue to be needed after 2028. Experiences in other countries, such as the LemaS project in Germany and the Knowledge Center for Giftedness in the Netherlands, can serve as a source of inspiration.

In recent years, several valuable tools for the identification and diagnosis of CSF children and youngsters have been developed within the Flemish context, as well as tools that may help school teams to find good accommodation for children and youngsters with specific educational needs and CSF learners in particular. The PRODIA protocol 'Specific Diagnostic Protocol for Cognitive Strong Functioning', and the viewing guide 'Learning characteristics of cognitively strong learners' that are being developed in the context of the governmental CSF Support Policy, help teachers to identify cognitive skills in their learners. The M-circle developed by Catholic Education Flanders offers a conceptual framework that can help teachers to deal with learners who need more than what is feasible within the so-called 'broad basic care' in schools. Although these and other available instruments and resources can be found on the online platforms of PRODIA, project Talent and within the learning networks of the governmental CSF Support Policy, they are still insufficiently embedded in schools or learner guidance centers, and data on their actual use are lacking. Furthermore, there are no specific tools for identifying CSF learners from minority backgrounds, and these tools and procedures need to be developed.

Teachers and other care providers are crucial in identifying and supporting CSF children and youngsters, but without proper training and upskilling, they will often be unsuccessful. Therefore, specific pre-service and in-service training should be developed in view of the professionalization of teachers and other professionals in this field. The subject should be included in the basic training of teachers at all levels of education, learner and school counsellors, teacher trainers, and other professionals (e.g. educators,

general practitioners), as well as in their in-service training, because professionalization is a continuous learning process. In these basic training and refreshing courses, explicit attention should be paid to combating all kinds of misconceptions and negative attitudes about CSF children and youngsters, their characteristics and educational needs. The identification of and care for disadvantaged CSF learners deserves extra attention. For individual professionals who want to become an CSF expert in their school or center, there should be an extra high-quality and affordable professionalization program.

Compared to neighboring countries, the Flemish education system is currently highly segregated, with an even growing number of learners being referred to special education. Although regular schools receive help from learner guidance centers and special education, this expertise is currently not integrated into the care system of regular schools. This does not work efficiently. That is why the Inclusive Education Committee argues in its recent report (2024) for a well-planned movement towards fully inclusive education by 2040. The plan is to integrate this expertise into mainstream education and to set up multidisciplinary teams that can promote adapted education for learners who need specific care. Within these multidisciplinary teams, it will be important to also include expertise in the field of CSF, as this is currently not under the competence or focus of the learner support centers and special education. This is an opportunity not to be missed!

In order to guarantee the quality of CSF education, the quality control by the Flemish Education Inspectorate must improve on this point. The extent to which a school can identify and challenge CSF learners is now only evaluated in schools that indicate that they (already) have a CSF policy or submit a care pathway for specific CSF learners. This must become an explicit and fixed element in all evaluations carried out by the Education Inspectorate.

Schools should structurally include the attention to adapted education for CSF learners and talent development in general. This can be done by making it a fixed topic in the school mission, internal quality assurance at school, the class councils and pedagogical conferences organized by the schools. Every school team should have an expert (team) in the field of CSF, so that the CSF perspective is included in the daily operation of a school.

CSF learners who performed smoothly in secondary education, but without developing good study skills, often encounter difficulties in the transition from secondary to higher education. Even further down in higher education, CSF learners still regularly experience a lack of recognition, challenge and appropriate guidance. The Flemish institutions for higher education are aware of these problems and are already making efforts to recognize the specific learning needs of these learners and thus to let their potential flourish maximally (e.g. through honors programs for excellent learners, special guidance and support in the transition to higher education), but an intensification and systematization of these efforts is needed, as in surrounding countries such as England and the Netherlands.

The increasing number of private centers and commercial institutions for the diagnosis and support of CSF children and youngsters, and sometimes also the guidance

of schools in the development of a CSF policy, fills a gap, especially with regard to exceptional CSF learners. Several professionals working in these private centers and commercial institutions have a scientific attitude, have built up thorough experiential knowledge, inform themselves about current scientific findings, and actively collaborate with academic research institutions. However, their offer is pricey and not well spread geographically. In addition, these private centers and commercial institutions lack quality control and do not always provide evidence-based information on CSF.

Finally, it is important that high-quality scientific research is conducted on CSF, because a good scientific knowledge base is the starting point for effective identification and intervention. Currently, this is partly made possible within the CSF Support Policy of the Flemish Government, but it remains highly dependent on the initiative and success of individual researchers. Extra impulses for research on cognitive talent development are therefore desirable. In general calls and projects on educational research, the government could stimulate special attention to the CSF perspective (e.g. specific follow-up of the highest performing learners on the standardized tests for elementary and secondary education in Flanders).

In a nutshell, our conclusions and recommendations boil down to this:

1. All learners have cognitive potential, but there are large interindividual differences in potential and in resulting learning performance. High potential is not a problem, but something positive that should be cherished. This has nothing to do with elitism.
2. To discover and realize their cognitive potential, CSF learners must get opportunities, encouragement, assistance, and instruction that aligns with their learning abilities and needs throughout their educational trajectory.
3. The recognition, stimulation and support of CSF children and youngsters, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, also contributes substantially to social cohesion and justice and ensures overall sustainable societal progress.
4. In order to optimally support CSF learners, timely and proper identification is of great importance. Cognitive strength manifests itself in many forms, can evolve over time and is accompanied by a wide range of personal characteristics.
5. Good support for CSF learners requires adaptive learning paths with accelerating, enriching, and/or deepening learning opportunities, both within and outside the regular classroom and school context. A flexible alternation or combination of support measures works best.
6. An important breakthrough in education and care for CSF learners came in 2020, when the Flemish Government made specific and substantial investments in it for the first time. This Support Policy for CSF learners has been extended until 2028. To safeguard and further implement this policy, government support will continue to be needed after 2028.
7. Valuable tools for the diagnosis and support of CSF learners have been developed, but they are not yet sufficiently embedded in the Flemish education and care system.

8. Because teachers and other care providers are crucial in the identification and support of CSF learners, investments should be made in their professionalization in this area, through high-quality and affordable pre-service and in-service training.
9. The care for and support of CSF learners should be structurally included in all levels of the educational system, in the counselling services for learners and schools, and in the external quality control by the Education Inspectorate.
10. The recently announced educational reform towards inclusive education and the accompanying plan to set up a multidisciplinary team within inclusive schools for learners who need specific care also offer opportunities for improving the attention and care for CSF learners, provided that these teams also have and provide expertise in the field of CSF.
11. The increasing number of private centers for the diagnosis and support of CSF children and youngsters and sometimes also for the guidance of schools in the development of a CSF policy, fills a gap, especially with regard to exceptional CSF learners. However, their offer is often pricey and there is no external quality control.
12. All stakeholders must stand up for the interests of CSF learners, with special attention to those with vulnerable background characteristics.

At the end of this summary, we make a warm appeal to all those involved to work together with the insights and recommendations from this KVAB Position paper.

1. Perspectives, research results and international context

Children and youngsters differ in their potential to learn and perform and in the opportunities they are offered in their environment to develop their potential. This results in differences in development and in educational results. Within this context, one might assume that those with high potential invariably have an advantage. However, the development of one's potential depends on multiple factors, and the education system does not seem to be optimally prepared for high-potential learners. In this Position paper, we take a closer look at these learners and their situation in Flanders.

We start this first part by defining the central terms and presenting general ways of thinking about children and youngsters with high potential as well as our own perspective (1.1). We then provide a summary of the main research findings about these learners, how they are identified and how they can be supported (1.2). We conclude with a description of important developments in Flanders regarding the identification and support of cognitively promising learners, and look at these developments from an international perspective (1.3).

1.1 Definitions, paradigms and own perspective

Box 1. Definition of central terms

Potential: In general, potential refers to an existing development opportunity that has not yet been realized. For example, having high potential in mathematics means that someone has the appropriate personal conditions to perform very well in the subject, but that does not necessarily mean that this person will.

Giftedness: A (very) high performance-related development potential, which can apply to many areas or only to a single domain. For example, there may be (highly) giftedness in the cognitive domain, or in music or sports.

Talent: An already developed potential, visible in performances, which is usually expressed in certain areas (for example, a mathematical or musical talent).

Cognitively strongly functioning (CSF) learners: Learners who, compared to their peers, show strong academic performance and/or a high developmental potential in one or more cognitive domains.

The **number of learners who fall within the group of CSF learners** is related to the specific definition that is used. For example, if we consider only one domain (e.g. general cognitive ability) and define CSF learners as belonging to the **top 10% in this domain**, then **10% of the population falls** within this group. However, if we consider five domains (e.g., math, languages, science, social sciences, and general cognitive skills), which on average show a moderate correlation ($r = .50$), and define a CSF learner as one who belongs to the **top 10% in at least one of these domains**, then **29% of the population** falls within this group. If we again consider five different domains,

with an average correlation of .50, and define a CSF learner as one that falls **into the top 1% in at least one of the five domains**, then **this percentage drops to about 4%**.³

What is 'high potential'? Who are the children and youngsters with a high potential? Why do they deserve support? How can we promote their development? Among researchers and practitioners, there are sometimes fierce debates about these four questions, which are related to their general ways of thinking - or in other words: their paradigm - about the theme.

Dai and Chen (2013) identified three such paradigms: the gifted child paradigm, the differentiation paradigm and the talent development paradigm.

In the **gifted child paradigm** giftedness is understood as a stable entity consisting of high general cognitive ability, which can be identified at an early stage through general mental ability tests or IQ tests. This status is associated with being different as a person from people who are not gifted, having special learning needs and abilities, and having the potential for future leadership. Therefore, this group needs special attention and should be optimally nurtured through special programs. This paradigm stems from intelligence research and differential psychology. It is the traditional view on giftedness, and it's often what people think of when they hear the term "gifted".

In the **differentiation paradigm** the focus is on individuality and associated needs and possibilities, rather than on 'high potential'. The idea is that certain needs and potentials of an individual may become apparent in a certain situation or at a certain time, and that these must then be addressed by education and that this approach must be adapted to these possibilities and needs in order to enable positive development. These needs and potentials may be obvious in one situation or at one moment, but not in another situation or at another time in development. Therefore, identification is a continuous process rather than a one-time event. In this paradigm, therefore, there is usually no question of giving a label or making a categorization. Within this paradigm, fostering takes place through adaptive and differentiated instruction. This paradigm, which has its roots in educational research, is often closely linked to the school context.

The **talent development paradigm** sits between the other two paradigms. Like the gifted child paradigm, it recognizes that people have different levels of potential. However, potential is not understood purely as general cognitive ability, but is conceptualized more broadly, and also includes general and specific abilities, personality traits and psychosocial skills. Potential is also understood as malleable to some extent (though not as situation-specific as in the differentiation paradigm). Its development is based on a successful interaction between cognitive abilities, personality traits and psychosocial skills and instruction that matches the learner's learning abilities. Identification of potential includes test results as well as performance at a specific time point and ongoing observation. In addition to instruction at school, extra support in authentic learning environments by experts is desirable. This paradigm stems from differential psychology and instructional psychology, and from expertise research.

² Percentages were estimated in a data simulation using the statistical software R and the package MASS (see F. Preckel & L. Hoogeveen (2025). Final Report Care for Talent – Practice and policy of the educational handling of CSF learners in Flanders. KVAB).

Our perspective is situated within the paradigm of talent development (see Appendix 2). We assume that all children and youngsters have the potential and the right to develop it. At the same time, we recognize that there are large interindividual differences in potential that go hand in hand with specific learning opportunities and needs. Potential does not develop by itself. Learners need stimulation, encouragement, and access to information to discover this potential. They need opportunities to learn through appropriate instruction, challenges, training, and support, and the offerings should align with their learning opportunities and needs. In addition, they need opportunities to 'find their thing' and develop their strengths. The significant differences in the opportunities given to learners to develop their potential are the result of both environmental characteristics and underlying individual characteristics. Appendix 2 includes a recent model of talent development (Talent Development in Achievement Domains; Preckel et al., 2020).

1.2 Research results

We present research results, with a particular focus on findings from Flanders, for three questions that we often encounter in the field: Do CSF children and youngsters have special needs? How well do parents and educators recognize 'high potential' in their child or young person? Which approach works best in promoting CSF?

Do CSF learners have specific needs?

CSF learners do not have a specific psychological profile. In this sense, they do not form a group with special needs that needs help because of special psychological or mental characteristics. But they do have their own **educational needs** (Meyer & Plucker, 2022; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2023).

- **Mismatch** between educational needs and educational offer. CSF learners often find themselves in an educational context in which they experience insufficient challenge and learning progress and therefore show less optimal learning motivation than their peers. In fact, Project Talent found that in Flanders, learners with high potential (i.e., the top 10% of all learners in terms of cognitive abilities) reported lower levels of engagement in schoolwork, learning goal orientation, and challenge than learners who function average (Ramos et al., 2021). To stimulate their development, the learning context must provide sufficient challenge and support to meet their need for competence. After all, competence and confidence in one's own abilities require confronting real challenges and overcoming them, in addition to meeting their needs for connectedness and autonomy (Lavrijsen et al., 2024).
- **Underperforming.** Some CSF learners underperform, have insufficient learning strategies and self-regulation skills, experience little control, and report low competence, motivation, and satisfaction in learning (Fong et al., 2023). Or they lose their motivation for and satisfaction in learning and underperform over time (Ramos et al., 2021). Findings from Project Talent showed that in Flanders, 10% of CSF learners had doubled a grade at least once at the end of secondary education, 18% had switched to a less academically oriented direction in secondary education,

and 39% had suffered a study delay in higher education (Ramos et al., 2019, 2021, 2025). It is important to notice and guide these underachievers. But in addition, one must try to prevent underachievement by offering sufficient challenge and support.

- **Learning strategies and psychosocial skills.** Because many of the CSF learners get through primary school and the early years of secondary education with little or no effort, they may need support in developing their learning skills, particularly when transitioning into the higher years of secondary education or into higher education (Ramos et al., 2022). In addition, because many of them perform at an advanced level, they may need specific support in developing higher self-regulation skills and stress resistance (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015).
- **Misconceptions.** CSF learners are regularly confronted with misconceptions about giftedness and 'high potential'. Contrary to popular belief, learners with high potential do not necessarily exhibit more intense experiences, heightened sensitivity, or increased vulnerability. Studies have also not found systematic differences in mental health, and some have even found better mental health in these learners (Lavrijsen & Verschueren, 2023; Neihart et al., 2002, 2016; Saß et al., 2025). If there are mental health problems, they usually stem from a mismatch between the needs of a CSF child or young person and the attitudes, expectations, offers and demands of their environment (Preckel et al., 2024), rather than from their 'high potential'. A shortage of challenges is more problematic than too many. Indeed, studies have shown that being cognitively challenged is linked to well-being, especially in high-potential learners (Bücker et al., 2018; Gnas et al., 2022), while boredom due to the lack of challenge can negatively impact their motivation, academic performance and well-being (Feuchter & Preckel, 2022).

Box 2. Key findings on characteristics of high-potential people (Preckel et al., 2024)

Abilities and personality: Cognitive skills are at the heart of great developmental potential; they are the best predictor of learning and achievement, and general cognitive skills explain between 25 and 50% of academic achievement. CSF learners therefore have higher cognitive skills. In addition, they are more open to new experiences and ideas and are more emotionally stable. They don't systematically differ from other people in terms of friendliness, accuracy, or extroversion.

Social competences: CSF learners differ little from other learners in terms of social relationships and social skills.

Achievement: Differences between CSF learners and other learners are most evident in terms of performance. Most, but not all, CSF learners succeed in converting their potential into good performance, often also in the academic field.

Perfectionism: Research distinguishes between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionism is characterized by taking pleasure in striving for excellence and setting high goals, and flexibly adapting them in the face of failure. In this way, adaptive perfectionists try to push their personal boundaries. Maladaptive

perfectionists, on the other hand, set unrealistically high expectations for themselves and do not accept failure. CSF learners are no different from other people in maladaptive perfectionism, but tend to exhibit higher adaptive perfectionism.

Motivation and self-image: CSF learners are not necessarily more motivated to achieve high or learn more than other learners. Most CSF learners do rate their own performance-related skills and their subjectively perceived control over their academic success higher than other learners. Furthermore, they rate their own appearance and athletic abilities slightly lower. They are more interested in intellectually demanding leisure activities, in literature, mathematics and music. However, in the variety of their interests, they do not systematically differ from other children or youngsters. In general, differences in interests are better explained by a person's gender rather than his or her cognitive potential.

Findings on **gender differences** in CSF learners usually support the general hypothesis of similarity between the sexes, which states that differences are usually negligible. However, there are gender differences for interests and preferences: girls and women with high potential appear to have a more balanced interest profile, while the interests and preferences of boys and men usually correspond to their respective cognitive strength(s).

How well do parents and educators recognize high potential in children and youngsters?

In order to adequately support children and youngsters with a lot of potential, parents and educators (as well as others active in the education and care system, such as CPG staff or pediatricians) need to identify their potential and related learning needs. However, this is not easy. This potential is not directly observable. It has to be deduced from their behavior, which is a very complex process. The child or youngster must exhibit relevant behavior, this behavior must be detected and correctly interpreted by parents and educators (Mack et al., 2025).

Research results generally show a positive, medium-sized association between **parents' judgments about** their child's potential (e.g., cognitive ability) and the child's actual potential, with a tendency to overestimate the child. However, the strength of this relationship varies considerably between studies (with correlations between .20 and .85; Schrader & Praetorius, 2018), which points to other factors that influence the quality of parents' judgments. Studies show that parents' judgements are influenced by the sex of their child: boys are typically rated higher and more accurately than girls (Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007; Mack et al., 2025). Furthermore, parents tend to judge first-born children more accurately than later-born children and higher-educated parents generally make more accurate judgments than lower-educated ones (Mack et al., 2025). Finally, it is important to note that parents' judgement is more determined by their children's school performance than by their cognitive ability. In other words, children with a lot of potential who do not perform well in school are often overlooked by their parents.

The same applies to **teachers' assessment of** their learners' potential (Gnas et al., 2022; Lavrijsen & Verschueren, 2020). While high-achieving high-potential learners are fairly well identified by their teachers, those with high-potential who are achieving average or low in school often go unnoticed (Hanses & Rost, 1998). Teachers are more successful in assessing learners' academic performance (correlations of .66 or .63; Hoge & Coladarci, 1989; Südkamp et al., 2012) than their cognitive potential (correlation of .43; Power et al., 2016). Studies have also shown that teachers tend to underestimate the cognitive ability and performance of stronger learners and overestimate those of weaker learners (Wollschläger, 2016). Teachers tend to underestimate the potential of girls, of learners with lower academic self-perceptions, of learners with lower socioeconomic or ethnic minority backgrounds, learners who are less well-known to the teacher, and learners in classes with an overall high average achievement level (Gnas et al., 2022; Lavrijsen & Verschueren, 2020).

Underestimation indirectly affects the performance of learners through their self-perceptions and feelings (see Figure 1). Lower teacher judgments of the potential of migrant and working-class learners and corresponding expectations towards these learners often generate feelings of hopelessness and academic uselessness in these learners and lower their perception of their own abilities, which in turn affects their motivation, joy of learning, and attitudes towards school and achievement (Agirdag et al., 2013; Gnas et al., 2024). On the other hand, research shows that overestimation of their potential by teachers correlates positively with learners' performance goals, their self-efficacy, perceived support from teachers and peers, academic self-image, enjoyment of learning, expectation of success, ambitions, while the correlation with anxiety is negative. Over the course of one year, overestimated learners showed greater improvement in their performance, participation, self-concept, motivation, and interests (Gniewosz & Watt, 2017; Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016; Urhahne, 2015; Urhahne et al., 2010, 2011; Zhou & Urhahne, 2013).

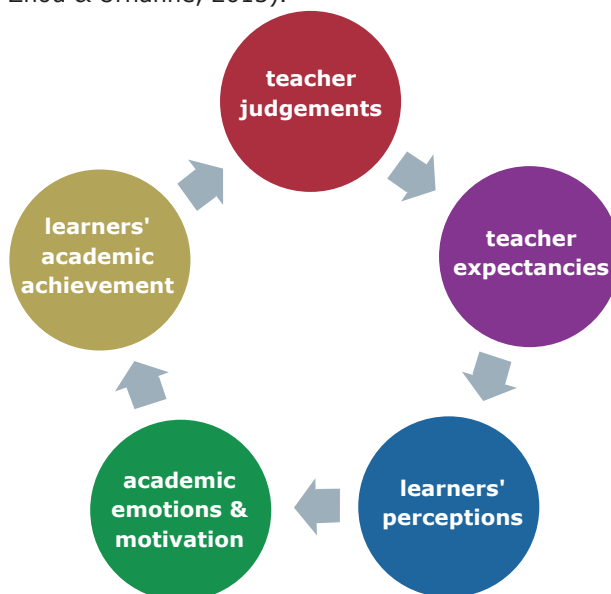


Figure 1. Teacher judgments indirectly impact learners and their achievement through learners' self-perceptions and feelings.

In conclusion, learners with high potential who do not perform well in areas valued by parents and teachers, who have a low socioeconomic status and/or a migrant background, who are female, or whose potential lies in areas that are not usually associated with them, and who lack confidence in their abilities, are often overlooked and therefore do not receive the support and encouragement needed for talent development.

Box 3. What works in identifying learners with high potential?

The definition of CSF learners in Box 1 includes learners who, compared to their peers, exhibit strong academic skills and achievement and/or have a high potential for positive performance-related development in one or more cognitive domains. Teachers are quite successful in identifying these learners on the basis of their high performance and strong skills, at least if these achievements and skills fall within domains that are covered in school. But high-potential learners who do not show strong academic skills and achievements compared to their peers are more difficult to identify.

Self-judgments and other judgments about one's own cognitive or academic abilities do not work well and are subject to systematic biases (Freund & Kasten, 2012; Zell & Krizan, 2014). The most objective, reliable and valid instruments for identifying cognitive abilities are **standardized cognitive ability tests** (Preckel, 2010). It is important to note that these test results only provide a temporary measurement result in pre-school and primary school learners. This can be valuable, but it is not stable and thus cannot be used to make long-term predictions about individual learners (Breit et al., 2024). In other words, in that age group, recent test results are needed when making important diagnostic decisions about a learner's school career. Moreover, because no cognitive ability test is culture-free, extra caution is required when using it with children and youngsters with a migration background (Agirdag & De Leersnyder, 2024; De Leersnyder, 2017). Finally, there are many different specific cognitive abilities (e.g., logical thinking, creativity, memory, speed of information processing). For individuals with higher levels of general cognitive ability the correlations between these more specific abilities are weaker than in those with average general cognitive ability, making an overall IQ score less informative (Breit et al., 2022, 2025). Therefore, it is important to use intelligence tests that provide scores for multiple abilities (structure of intelligence tests) and not just an overall IQ score.

Furthermore, in order to identify learners with high potential, it is important to **provide them with sufficient opportunities to explore and show their potential**. From a talent development perspective, learners should first be offered appropriate learning opportunities that are stimulating and encouraging and thus allow exploration before identifying their potential ("First foster, then find!"). In particular, high-potential learners who come from vulnerable educational backgrounds need more initial support to explore and show their potential.

Since cognitive potential can show up in different domains at different times and ages, identification is an **ongoing process**. For example, mathematical potential can already be identified in young children, whereas in domains such as psychology or politics potential cannot be identified before reaching adolescence or even later (Subotnik et al., 2011).

Finally, it is important to **base the identification on criteria** that are in line with scientifically based insights into what high potential in a given domain entails. To do this, it is helpful to answer the following questions: What components make up this potential? What are the valid indicators of these components? How can they be assessed? How can the assessment results of the different components be combined for the purpose of identification? Moreover, when evaluating the potential of learners, it is important to **choose the right reference group** (for example, learners from minority groups should be compared with peers from the same group, rather than with majority learners).

Which forms of support work best for CSF learners?

CSF learners are insufficiently challenged with the regular curriculum, which makes it necessary to adjust the curriculum. This can be done in various ways, which are described in this section. However, these adjustments do not provide a complete picture of how education can be adapted. For example, there are private initiatives that are organized outside regular education and for which no research data are available. The question to what extent these initiatives are beneficial for CSF children or youngsters can therefore not be answered on the basis of research.

a. Differentiation within the classroom

Within classroom differentiation means that the teacher adapts the instruction to the learners of his or her class to individual differences between these learners (Göksu et al., 2023). In this way, the teacher offers space for the diversity of learners within the classroom and adapts one or more aspects of education (content, teaching method, evaluation, etc.) to meet the different needs of learners (Nicholas et al., 2024). Until now, indoor classroom differentiation has mainly focused on learners whose learning progress and performance do not reach the expected level. Due to a lack of frames of reference and appropriate training in how to differentiate for CSF learners, there is a risk that teachers are less willing and able to focus on this group of learners in classroom differentiation. The effectiveness of within classroom differentiation, especially towards CSF learners, depends on their professional development (Nicholas et al., 2024). Another key factor in the success of this form of differentiation for CSF learners is that the core responsables for education, such as the teachers, the school management and the school board, have a shared vision of effective practices for supporting differentiated education for CSF learners.

b. Acceleration

Most researchers use Pressey's (1949) definition of acceleration in education: "Progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional" (p. 2). There are numerous ways to accelerate learning (Hoogeveen, 2022; Southern & Jones, 2015). Some of these are less visible and can be applied by teachers without being known by the school management, other teachers and/or parents. More visible ways to accelerate are entering education earlier and skipping one or more grades. Other, less striking forms of acceleration, such as working with grade classes or with even more far-reaching breaks in the year class system, are not well documented. Steenbergen et al. (2016) reviewed the available meta-analytic evidence and concluded

that academic acceleration can significantly improve learners' academic performance. Another conclusion of this and several other studies is that there are no negative social or emotional effects of acceleration in CSF learners, either in the short or long term (Bernstein et al., 2021; Hoogeveen, 2022; Hoogeveen et al., 2012), and that it is therefore a form of adaptation that should be considered for CSF learners.

c. *Enrichment*

Renzulli et al. (2021) define enrichment as "... experiences and activities that are not a part of the regular curriculum, but rather extend and enhance the regular curriculum" (p. 185). Enrichment programs can have positive effects on the performance and social-emotional functioning of CSF learners (Kim, 2016; Reis et al., 2021). Kim synthesized the current studies between 1985 and 2014 on the effects of enrichment programs on gifted learners. A total of 26 studies were included in this meta-analysis. It was found that enrichment programs had a positive impact on both academic performance and the social-emotional development of these learners. Since much of the research on enrichment has been carried out by the developers of the enrichment programs themselves (Renzulli et al, 2021), we need to look at these findings with the necessary critical sense. A specific form of enrichment are summer camps for CSF learners, which offer opportunities to deepen academic knowledge, build self-confidence and form lasting friendships with peers who also function cognitively strongly (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003). In the US, such programs – often intensive and fast-paced – have shown long-term benefits, especially among CSF learners from weaker socioeconomic backgrounds, including higher attendance and graduation rates (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). The German equivalent, the Schülerakademie (student academy), offers high-level courses and joint learning experiences for CSF learners, and several studies have shown positive effects in terms of motivation, self-efficacy and social relationships (<https://www.deutsche-schuelerakademie.de>). Participants in such student academies often report clearer academic goals and friendships built up for many years after joining. In summary, we can say that both the American and German summer academies generally have a positive influence on the personal, academic and social development of CSF learners (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Preckel et al., 2016).

d. *Pull-out programs*

In a pull-out program, which can be considered a specific form of enrichment, learners are separated from non-participating learners each day or week for a certain period of time and instructed separately, inside or outside their school (Cash & Lin, 2022). Kim's meta-analysis (2016) supports previous meta-analyses that showed that pull-out programs have a positive impact on the academic performance of CSF learners. However, unlike Vaughn et al. (1991), who found no significant impact on social-emotional development, Kim suggests that pull-out programs can also benefit social-emotional outcomes when a wider range of aspects beyond self-concept are included. De Graaf et al. (2021) found that following pull-out programs in primary schools led to better performance in secondary education. Cash and Lin, who compared a self-contained and a pull-out program to with the regular education program, found mixed findings. Based on their findings, they stress the need to take individual differences into account when evaluating programs for high-potential learners. For example, the impact of a program on the psychological well-being of the learners appears to interact with individual learner

characteristics. So it is important to recognize that psychological well-being is just one of many factors that need to be considered when choosing and setting up a program.

Nicholas et al. (2024) mention another important issue: There is a risk that pull-out programs could take the responsibility for teaching gifted learners away from the regular classroom teacher. It must be clear that, even when learners participate in a pull-out program, adjustments to their program in the regular classroom are still desirable.

e. Ability grouping and full-time gifted education

Ability grouping is the practice of grouping learners according to their ability and/or academic performance across classes. This can be part-time or full-time. We speak of full-time CSF education when gifted learners exclusively learn together with other gifted learners (Cash & Lin, 2022; Hooegeveen, 2008). The findings on the effects of such full-time giftedness education are mixed, both in terms of performance and social-emotional well-being (Cash & Lin, 2022; Hooegeveen, 2008). Merely grouping gifted learners into special classes does not support their performance or development. What matters is whether the instruction they receive in this special setting is also adapted to their learning needs (Plucker & Dilley, 2016). Zeidner and Schleier (1999) found that learners who had received full-time gifted education had a more positive attitude towards various facets of the school environment and a greater satisfaction with the school in general. Preckel et al. (2019) found better performance gains for mathematics and no negative effect on the academic self-image of CSF learners in full-time gifted education. In their review of meta-analyses, Steenbergen-Hu et al. (2016) found six meta-analyses on part-time level grouping for gifted learners, which revealed an average positive effect of medium strength on gifted learners' achievement. Hardly any research has been done on the impact of part-time ability grouping or full-time gifted education on the other, non-gifted learners.

f. Homeschooling

In home education, parents take care of the education of their child(ren) themselves and entirely or largely at home (Valiente et al., 2022). This education can take many forms (Connolly-Sporing et al., 2024). There are several reasons for parents to make the decision to homeschool their children or youngsters. When it comes to CSF learners, Connolly-Sporing et al. (2024) cite dissatisfaction with education as the primary cause: "The lack of intellectual and academic challenge often experienced by advanced or gifted students in formal school settings" (p. 638). Although some parents of CSF learners have opted for home education for many years, virtually no research has been done on home education for CSF learners and its effects. Internationally, it is therefore unclear how many CSF learners are homeschooled, what that education looks like and what effects it has on them. Section 2.2 briefly discusses a recent study by the Flemish Education Inspectorate on the growing popularity of home education, the motives for it and the quality of the education offered.

In conclusion, there is a lack of research into the effects of differentiation for CSF learners. There is a solid scientific basis with regard to educational acceleration, which indicates that acceleration is very effective for CSF learners, with positive effects on achievement and usually without problems with regard to social integration in the new

group. Enrichment, and especially summer programs, lead to medium to large positive effects on academic and social-emotional development (the latter especially for secondary school students). Findings regarding pull-out programs are mixed, and special schools or classes for CSF learners lead to moderately strong positive effects. Due to the almost non-existent research on homeschooling, giving clear policy recommendations on the subject is, according to Connolly-Sporing et al. (2024), "premature, (if not impossible)" (p. 649), and the same applies to the effectiveness of other extra-school initiatives (private initiatives, parents).

Overall, we can conclude that different adaptations and programs work for CSF learners, depending on their needs at a particular point in their school career and on the specific circumstances at school and at home. Important in deciding how best to shape the education of CSF learners is the realization that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution. For each CSF child or youngster, his or her individual characteristics and needs must be taken into account. In general, a single educational approach is not sufficient for CSF learners in the long run. Typically, a combination of support models is required, which can be implemented in a range of different contexts, including special classes.

1.3 International context

Meeting the educational and social-emotional needs of CSF learners is necessary and challenging. In order to get an overview of gifted education in Flanders, we met various stakeholders and experts from practice, policy and research in the context of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle mentioned above (see Introduction). The overall impression was that there are many highly engaged stakeholders, resulting in some very good practices. The fact that the KVAB has chosen education for CSF children and youngsters as the subject for one of its recent Thinker Cycles testifies to the relevance of and social concern about the theme. This was also evidenced by the great willingness of all categories of stakeholders to participate in the Thinkers' Cycle. As was to be expected, however, there is still room for improvement. In the second part of this Position paper, we will take a closer look at those points for improvement. But before starting this second part, we give a brief sketch of the history and current situation of the educational handling of CSF learners in Europe in general, in two neighboring countries, namely Germany and the Netherlands, and, finally, in Flanders.

Europe

The differences between European countries in terms of the identification of and the provisions regarding CSF learners are large. VanTassel-Baska (2009) called the development of gifted education in the United States a patchwork, and this also applies to the European situation. In addition to scientific, educational and social dimensions, gifted education has an important political dimension, which affects people with high ability and also determines social development and changes in the community (Sekowski et al., 2019). That does not necessarily have to be a problem, as long as children and youngsters are given the opportunity to develop at a level that matches their abilities. Based on her research into the past, present and future of gifted education in Europe, Hoogeveen concluded (in press) that most European countries have opportunities to support gifted learners, but that this does not always happen in practice. Many countries do not have separate schools for CSF learners, but do take special measures for them

such as enrichment programs or special classes for CSF learners. Some countries do not officially recognize giftedness but still meet the needs of gifted learners through flexible programs. In Greece, the needs of gifted learners are hardly taken into account, while the Finnish curriculum has differentiation for all, including the gifted. Russia does not have a systematic approach to gifted learners in education, but instead focuses on Olympiads and special elite schools, while in Switzerland gifted learners usually attend regular classes with certain enrichment opportunities.

A complicating factor in providing appropriate gifted education is that the target group is not homogeneous (Nicholas et al., 2024; Sekowski, 2019; Thomas, 2018). Whereas in the first theories of giftedness, it is considered a measurable and stable trait ("you are either gifted or you are not", see the gifted child paradigm), the most recent models focus on transaction, talent development, and the effectuation of human possibilities (Dai & Chen, 2013; Lo & Porath, 2017). The tendency to put more emphasis on capabilities rather than shortages (Weyringer, 2013) – or as Siegle described it at the ECHA conference in Thessaloniki in 2024: "be a talent scout, not a deficit detective" (Siegle, 2024) – is more in line with that talent development vision.

Hoogeveen (in print) concluded that in all European countries there is still a need for more awareness of the needs of gifted learners and for forms of education suitable for them. She considers people's misconceptions about gifted people, their need for support and what good education means for them to be the most persistent obstacles to the development of special programs and services for gifted and talented learners. The European Talent Support Network (ETSN) and the European Council for High Ability (ECHA) can help to change this by pooling knowledge and experience.

Germany

PISA results show that too few German learners are performing at the top level. Learners with lower levels improved their score in recent decades, those with higher levels did not. Inventories in the early 2000s on the support of learners in the Länder education systems (Holling et al., 2001, 2004) were crucial for improving the situation for CSF learners in Germany and in particular for many fostering opportunities developed for them over the past two decades. All federal states have schools with gifted classes or special schools for them. There are many ways in which acceleration is possible (for example, there is often no minimum age requirement to start primary school, it is possible to skip one or more classes, and high school students can already participate in university courses).

Many schools offer enrichment activities, such as after-school student work groups, there are national summer schools for high school learners, and various student competitions. Additionally, Germany has a long tradition of foundations that provide intellectual and financial support in the form of around 300 different types of scholarships for deserving school and college learners, many of which are specifically aimed at CSF learners. Support programs for CSF learners with a low socioeconomic status or a migration background include 'Talent im Land', 'Grips gewinnt', 'VorbilderAkademie' and 'Arbeiterkind.de'. Many different institutions are also involved, such as the expertise center "Bildung und Begabung", parent organizations such as the "Deutsche Gesellschaft für das hochbegabte Kind" (DGHK), and professional organizations. However, many of

those support options take place outside of the regular classroom. To address this issue, the important LemaS project was launched in 2018. With the support of the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space and the Länder, an interdisciplinary research network consisting of several German universities, in collaboration with schools, has developed materials and strategies to support CSF learners in the regular classroom. The International Center for Giftedness Research (ICBF), part of the University of Münster, is also a European Talent Center (ETSN). One of their activities is to offer a qualified ECHA teacher training program. Compared to Flanders, it seems that the support of CSF learners is more focused on performance than on their needs and well-being. While needs and well-being are also important, the focus of most programs is more on increasing performance and engagement and preventing underachievement. Despite many positive developments, Germany is also facing challenges in this area. For example, the tight separation between kindergarten and primary school poses a challenge to a coherent and continuous educational approach for CSF learners. Germany has a system of early tracing, which is heavily influenced by socioeconomic status. There are still many misconceptions about CSF learners and giftedness, and the training of educators and teachers who want to focus more on gifted education is still insufficient. And within the healthcare system, the student-to-school-psychologist ratio is low (an average of 5,300 students per school psychologist) and expertise is still lacking.

The Netherlands

As far as the PISA studies are concerned, the situation in the Netherlands is similar to that in Germany: learners with lower ability levels have improved in recent years, but those with higher levels have not, resulting in too few learners with top performance. The Netherlands has a national talent center, namely the National Talent Center of the Netherlands (NTCN), which focuses on professionals who work with gifted learners in primary and secondary education or related institutions and practices that ensure that these professionals have access to up-to-date and applicable knowledge and expertise. The aim is to build on existing knowledge, answer practical questions that are readily available, and connect people, organizations and networks. Since the establishment of the Nijmegen Center for the Study of Giftedness (CBO, now CBO Talent Development) under the leadership of Prof. Lianne Hoogeveen in 1988, many fostering programs and options have been developed. The initial teacher training programs do not pay sufficient attention to gifted education. Many teachers in the Netherlands follow the RITHA (Radboud Training on High Ability) training, an ECHA qualified training. In recent years, a large government-funded project, 'Impact of Activities in Gifted Education' (IMAGE), has investigated the impact of projects funded by large government subsidies in Dutch schools in the field of gifted education. In 2007, gifted profile schools joined forces in the Association of Gifted Profile Schools (BPS), which aims to represent the interests of giftedness profile schools in both primary and secondary education, to promote knowledge exchange, and to build bridges within and outside primary and secondary education. As of May 1, 2025, there are 101 (candidate) members: 60 secondary and 41 primary schools. In the field of mental health care, there is still a lack of knowledge among psychologists. Research into giftedness is being conducted in various universities. For example, Radboud University has a research team 'Radboud Talent in Development (RATiO)', which conducts scientific research into giftedness that is strongly focused on its integration into the practice and policy of education.

Flanders

In 2023, the Flemish Government approved the decree on learning support, with measures for mainstream education, learning support, and special education to further shape the policy on education for learners with specific educational needs (Struyf et al., 2024). Struyf et al. took this as a starting point to argue for inclusive education, where inclusion is self-evident and segregation is no longer an option. While this commitment to inclusion focuses on all learners, it is primarily focused on learners with learning, developmental, or physical disabilities.

This does not mean that Flemish education does not pay attention to CSF learners. The Protocolling Diagnostics (Prodia) project developed a General Diagnostic Protocol for schools and learner guidance centers of all educational networks, which aims for more standardized and high-quality learner guidance within a continuum of care, aimed at action-oriented diagnostics. This protocol (see: <https://ap.lc/mysSV>) is used as a guideline for diagnostics, with different phases in a continuum of care. It forms the broader framework for the various Specific Diagnostic Protocols, of which the Strong Cognitive Functioning Protocol is one. However, Brinckman and Floyd (2021) noted that, although the social importance of CSF learners is clear, there is no clear and specific policy for them in Flanders, in contrast to learners with other learning needs and needs for whom separate structural funding and support does exist.

The increasing attention for CSF learners is reflected in special schools for CSF learners, student competitions, honors programs for university students, extra hours for care in primary and secondary education, more attention to CSF in teacher training programs and special training programs for teachers. There are parent organizations and private centers aimed at this target group. In 2020, the Flemish government invested for the first time in education and care specifically for CSF learners. Twelve anchor schools and one expertise center were appointed with the aim of professionalizing other schools in supporting CSF learners and improving the empirical underpinning of this support. This 'Exemplary Schools Project' was expanded in 2023 ('Support Policy CSF Learners', 2023-2028), involving 20 anchor schools and an Interuniversity Center of Expertise, a collaboration between the universities of Leuven, Antwerp and Ghent. In addition to conducting and disseminating research on CSF learners, the Center of Expertise supports the anchor schools in evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions and coordinates their professional learning networks with other schools (see also Box 4). From September 2022, Flemish schools have more legal options to accelerate secondary school students. To support schools in implementing this acceleration, guidelines have been developed within the Support Policy CSF (Guideline for Acceleration, LEV; Van Hyfte, s.d.), to help schools think about the possibilities, consequences and possible steps of acceleration. KU Leuven also hosts the Leuven Talent Center of Flanders, which is part of the European Talent Support Network (ETSN), which aims at European cooperation in this field. In addition, there seems to be an emergence of private advice and support centers for CSL learners, and there is a lot of documentation that can inform schools, parents and other stakeholders. However, representatives of the Flemish cabinet still see challenges, such as solutions for exceptionally advanced learners and twice exceptional learners (i.e. learners with high cognitive capacities on the one hand and characteristics of a learning, developmental and/or behavioral problem on the other). They also propose to conduct evaluation studies to determine whether educational adjustments are having the intended effect on CSF learners.

2. Points of reflection and recommendations

The reflections and recommendations that we present in this second part of the Position Paper are largely based on the information and documentation that we have collected during school visits and interviews with the various stakeholders in the context of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle, and on the discussions that have been held in the Steering Committee of this Thinkers' Cycle. Of course, we have also made use of our own expertise in the field of CSF. As indicated earlier (see 1.1), these reflections and recommendations can be situated within the perspective of talent development.

2.1 Attitudes and attitudes

Based on the interviews, it was noted that issues related to CSF learners are taken seriously nowadays, but also that there are misconceptions and ambivalent attitudes towards CSF learners and how to support them. These misconceptions and attitudes are based in part on mistaken dichotomies between equity versus excellence or between well-being versus performance. Representatives of the European Union, as well as Prof. Wouter Duyck (Ghent University), argue that typical schools are not well-equipped to understand or identify the problem, and according to Dirk Van Damme, international education expert, there is an inclusive focus on equity and well-being with the assumption that achievement is negatively related to well-being.

"It's weird to be different from the rest of the class: you want to be popular. Make gifted education as normal as possible and refute the stigma around being the teacher's darling." (representatives of high school students)

"Many schools are convinced that they should have an eye for students with specific educational needs. Until ten years ago, all attention was paid to students who experience difficulties at school due to a disability or learning and behavioral problems, and CSF students were completely sidelined. Nowadays, most schools realize that they also have to look at CSF students." (representative of the pedagogical guidance centers)

Based on these reflections, we formulate the following recommendations:

- In order to properly implement programs for CSF learners, it is important to know and assess teachers' attitudes and attitudes towards CSF learners (Plunckett & Kronberg, 2011). **Changing attitudes takes a lot of time** and is necessary.
- It is important that there is clarity **about definitions and paradigms** around CSF learners.
- Once that is clear, all stakeholders should work together to determine the goals of **supporting CSF learners**.
- There still seems to be the idea that the pursuit **of excellence is opposed to equal opportunities in education and that the pursuit of well-being and strong learning is irreconcilable. These are myths!**

- **Misconceptions** among teachers, parents and learners must be debunked with the help of **scientific substantiation**. **High cognitive ability should be seen as something positive**, and it should be clear that there are different talent domains.
- There is a need for an **integrative approach** in education in which CSF learners are included.
- Every school should have an **expert (or a team) in the field of CSF learners**, so that the perspective of the CSF learners is included in every discussion about educational matters.
- **Words matter**. Make sure that everyone in the communication knows exactly what it is about.

2.2 Responsibilities and professionalization

The many conversations with the various stakeholders in the context of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle have shown that the majority of them are very involved in this subject, and that a strong partnership has grown between research, policy and practice, etc., thanks in part to the great efforts of the TALENT Expertise Center. There needs to be more clarity about who exactly is responsible for what. For example, the EU interviewees asked the question who is (best) responsible for the diagnosis of CSF learners in Flanders. Such unclear powers can be seen throughout Europe. What can and should certainly be improved is quality control. There is also a need for more knowledge and expertise about CSF learners. Within the learning networks set up within the framework of the Flemish Government's CSF Learners Support Policy, the professionalization of the teachers of the schools concerned is free of charge (i.e. financed by the government). But teachers from schools that are not in a learning network have to look for paid professionalization opportunities, which is often a major challenge because of the low budget available for this. Most interviewees agree that the subject belongs in the initial teacher training curriculum, but administrators and lecturers of these institutions indicate that there is no longer room for this subject in the curriculum. This leads to uncertainty among teachers, while they should be 'empowered', so that a CSF specialist is not always needed (information from learner guidance centers representatives).

"Professionalisation of teachers is the key to improving the support of CSF learners" (representatives of learner guidance centers and learning support centers)

"Purchasing expertise about CSF poses a financial problem for schools." (representatives of the professional and academic teacher training colleges)

Private training courses for schools and individual teachers are offered by Spring-stof and Exentra, among others, which focus primarily on the cognitively talented learners who do not get enough of their attention in their school. But more evidence-based content is needed, which is only possible if people have easy access to research. Although material from other countries such as the Netherlands is useful, it is rarely directly usable and adjustments are needed.

According to a very recent report by the Flemish Education Inspectorate (<https://ap.ic/vJYQo>), the number of school-age children who follow individual home education has increased

sharply in recent years, both in absolute figures and in percentages. The number of learners receiving individual home education has increased from 1,054 to 3,471 over the past 10 years. Less pronounced is the increase, especially from 2020-2021, in collective home education (i.e. parents who jointly or alternately provide education for the children or education in non-recognized and non-subsidized private schools). There we see an increase from 1,291 to 2,303 learners in 10 years. A survey of the motives for individual home education according to the parents of primary school pupils showed that in 6.12% of the cases cognitive strong functioning was given as an argument for home education, and the same question to the secondary school students yielded a similar percentage (6.20%).

Based on this information, we come to the following recommendations:

- More evidence-based knowledge and expertise about learners should be available, not only to teachers, but also to professionals in the educational care system, doctors and parents. Parents and other interested parties should also be informed of the available documentation material.
- It is of the utmost importance that teachers, as well as other professionals involved in the educational care for CSF learners, have the knowledge and skills needed to meet the educational needs of CSF learners. All of these professionals should know that misconceptions exist on this topic and should be able to debunk them, using available literature and scientific research. The Project Talent offers a government-funded training for teachers from schools that are in their network. This is an intensive training and guidance program of at least one year, within a professional learning network and supervised by a chosen anchor school, which in turn is supported by the Talent Expertise Center. About 15% of primary and secondary schools in Flanders have already participated in this professionalization process. These training courses are evaluated every year on the basis of (pre-post) surveys (cf. annual reports). There are also **in-service training opportunities** for teachers from other schools, but these are not for free.
- The theme of CSF should **be integrated into the initial training** for teachers and mental health professionals, where topics such as misconceptions about CSF, cognitive potential and factors influencing learning and talent development, identification and support of CSF should be addressed.
- To guarantee the quality of CSF learner support, **quality control** by the inspectorates must be improved. The topic of CSF learners should be an explicit and standard part of the inspection of schools, not only when the school has an official program for these learners. In other words, the question "what does your school do for CSF learners?" must be explicitly asked at every inspection.
- **Homeschooling** can be a solution for some CSF learners. The (central) Examination Board, which offers secondary school students the opportunity to obtain a certificate or diploma of secondary education at their own pace through self-study and to take an exam on this at the examination center in Brussels, can play a useful role in this. However, more support and control of homeschooling is needed, specifically aimed at CSF students, such as mandatory registration and annual assessment of these students (Connolly-Sporing et al., 2024; Flemish Education Inspectorate, 2025), to ensure that they receive quality education that meets their needs.

- Finally, **more attention should be paid to disadvantaged CSF learners** such as children and youngsters with high cognitive potential with a migrant background or a low SES, who are too often not identified and do not receive the educational care they need.

2.3 *Supporting CSF learners*

In Flanders, as mentioned earlier, there is a lot of material available that can help to improve the support of CSF learners. The fact that most primary schools in Flanders offer both kindergarten and primary education is advantageous, as it allows for early identification and ongoing support of CSF learners, without potentially annoying transitions.

It is very important for CSF learners that Flanders has an open education system, i.e. that every secondary school diploma gives access to higher education, and that home education is legally allowed, also provide room for flexibility in education. The possibility of taking central exams to obtain a recognized secondary school diploma without going to school facilitates acceleration as an educational measure. The fact that 20% of the students who take the exam at this Board of Examiners are younger than expected shows that this opportunity is used to accelerate and to make an individual study plan.

Although exams in the last year of primary school are allowed and common, there is no standardized central exam at this level in Flanders. Schools must therefore organize this themselves. This is a pity, because most CSF learners already accelerate in primary school.

"Let's greatly reduce the bureaucratic red tape and the meeting nuisance and instead spend much more time on the guidance and support of the students."

(representatives of Learner guidance centersLearner guidance centers and learning support centers)

The well-developed care and guidance system for learners and schools in Flanders offers opportunities for more attention to and better support for CSF learners, although more tuning and cooperation is also needed here.

Flanders has several examples of very good education for CSF learners, including the selected Anchor Schools within the CSF Support Policy. As part of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle, we visited the primary school De Kleine Icarus in Ghent, which provides a well-developed system of within classroom differentiation supplemented with within school enrichment and acceleration for CSF learners. We also visited the middle school De Stroom in Leuven, which helps students of the first two years of secondary education to find their potential and talents by organizing project weeks, which offers them the opportunity to work individually during 'flex hours' and which offers training of executive functions. However, many schools do not (yet) have a detailed program for CSF learners. The four current strategies that schools now use, namely remediation, compensation, differentiation and exemption, are not sufficient for these learners and must be supplemented with strategies of enrichment, acceleration, and strengthening

of forces. How CSF learners are identified and adapted is entirely dependent on the individual school, leading to missed CSF learners, and this situation is even more urgent for CSF learners with vulnerable background characteristics.

Anchor schools can be an example for other schools in terms of the identification and support of CSF learners. However, it remains a challenge to reach the schools outside this network. In addition, more documentation is needed on the approach to CSF learners, both in the schools that belong to this network and in schools that are not part of it.

Not all CSF learners are faced with the necessary challenges in higher education either. Although there are honors programs, which can mainly be found in mathematics and the other STEM fields, there are fewer in other programs. The resources that go to CSF students are limited. Youngsters can start higher education from the age of 15 on the condition that they have a secondary education diploma, but universities and colleges are ill-prepared for this special group of learners. The Flemish Student Association wrote a valuable report with 18 recommendations to improve higher education for CSF students. In summary, they argue for more broadening and deepening of teaching materials, extra master classes, workshops and honors programs for excellent students, and support for competitions and scholarships. They also plea for lecturers to act as a sounding board, for more flexibility in exemptions and exam formats, for students to be offered more autonomy and agency in classes, and for students with high scores to have the same opportunities for feedback as other students. They also argue that internships and extracurricular engagements should be more valued, 'micro credentials' should be promoted, and more attention should be paid to the psychological guidance of CSF students. Finally, they ask that the training of lecturers would teach them how to deal with CSF students, and that excellent students should be given the opportunity to help fellow students with their studies (<https://ap.lc/oLVQd>). In response to this, the Inclusive Higher Education Support Center, in collaboration with the Talent Expertise Center, developed the Cognitive Strong Functioning Guideline: Guidelines for an inclusive policy in (the transition to) higher education. (<https://ap.lc/ppqIS>)

Box 4. Project Talent

The Talent Expertise Center originated from Project TALENT, a collaboration between KU Leuven, University of Antwerp and Ghent University, which started in 2017 and was funded as an SBO project by the Fund for Scientific Research. The mission of the interuniversity center is to gain a better understanding of the psychosocial, motivational, and learning development of CSF children and youngsters and how the educational and home environment can promote this development. In addition, the goal is to use these scientific insights to strengthen education and care for CSF learners.

Since 2020, the Talent Expertise Center has been working with (currently) 20 anchor schools in a project funded by the Flemish Government ('Support Policy CSF Learners'). With the support of the center, anchor schools organize professional learning networks in which they share evidence-informed educational practices and support the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers in other schools in Flanders or Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels (both primary and secondary education). Participation in these learning networks is completely free of charge.

Project Talent plays a crucial role in this start-up phase. In our interviews with various stakeholders, it became clear that the Talent project really made a difference and was already improving the situation of CSF learners in Flanders. The challenge now is to involve even more schools in the learning networks, *"We are not there yet. Implementing an effective and sustainable CSF policy in schools requires time and priority"* (Prof. Karine Verschueren, director of the Talent Expertise Center).

More information about Project Talent can be found on <https://www.projecttalent.be/>

Based on these reflections, we recommend the following:

- Provide a **holistic approach with a wide variety of** methods in all levels of Flemish education.
- Teachers should help learners find their potential.
- For disadvantaged learners, **front-loading** may be necessary. Front-loading is "the process of preparing learners for advanced content and creative and critical thinking prior to identification or before advanced level courses are offered" (Briggs et al., 2008, p. 137). In other words, disadvantaged learners should be given the opportunity to gain experience with advanced (learning) tasks before they are screened and diagnosed for CSF.
- In general, there should be an atmosphere in which **cognitive skills are nurtured at all levels of education**.
- Education must **be in line with the level of talent development** and the measures offered must build on each other.
- **Project Talent** (see Box 4) is a very good source of information about CSF for learners and their parents as well as for schools, teachers and other professionals who want to optimize their vision and support of CSF learners. Scientific insights, tools and materials are disseminated via an online Talent Platform (www.projecttalent.be) and a newsletter.
- There are various policy- and practice-oriented **publications** that can help stakeholders support CSF learners.
- **The M-circle**, which was developed in the Catholic Education Network as a framework for action-oriented reflection and coaching, has not been developed specifically for CSF learners, but **can also be used for CSF learners**. However, the four strategies mentioned in the M-circle – remediate, differentiate, compensate and dispense – must be complemented by additional, powerful strategies for CSF learners, such as enrichment, acceleration and other adjustments of education that can strengthen the learning and performance of CSF learners.
- **Look beyond the borders**. Experiences in other countries, such as LemaS in Germany, the Giftedness Profile Schools and the Knowledge Center for Giftedness in the Netherlands can help and inspire CSF education in Flanders. At the European level, the European Council for High Ability (ECHA) provides inspiration and information about support options, and at the international level, there is the (American) National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC). Several conferences are organized by ECHA, the World Council of Gifted and Talented Children (WCGT) and

NAGC. These conferences provide an opportunity to learn about recent research and to meet other people who work with CSF learners, which can be inspiring and lead to new ways to teach and support CSF learners.

2.4 Identification

In Flanders, many different methods are used for the identification of CSF learners. These include standardized cognitive ability tests, questionnaires and checklists, behavioral observations, response to intervention, self-selection, nominations, or interviews (e.g., on a learner's developmental and educational history). The domains covered include cognitive abilities, needs, interests and motivation, academic performance and the level of development of domain-specific skills, and signs of excessive excitability and intensity. In the interviews with the stakeholders during the Thinkers' Cycle, an ambivalent attitude towards cognitive ability tests regularly emerged, in which people rated one's own experience- or feeling-based assessment of a CSF learner as more informative than the results on one or more of the aforementioned identification instruments. In general, there are no generally applicable binding identification methods, instruments, and criteria in Flanders. The anchor schools of the Project Talent use an approach that emphasizes **dynamic identification** and the importance of using **multiple informants and information sources**. The Project Talent website informs about signaling processes and instruments that schools can use.

Other useful tools are also available. Project Talent provides self-report scales for finding out learners' interests, self-concept, motivation, academic, behavioral, and emotional engagement. The Talent Centers supported by VOKA and supervised by Ghent University and the Columbus project initiated by the Flemish Government offer tools to support school career and vocational career choices. As early as 2003, the Protocolling Diagnostics (Prodia) project assessed the available diagnostic material for CSF learners and in 2019 they published the PRODIA protocol "Specific Diagnostic Protocol for Cognitive Strong Functioning". This protocol contains quality standards and guidelines for identification of CSF learners in educational contexts. But the protocol is not structurally embedded in schools or learner guidance centers and there is no systematic knowledge about its use.

"Every child in our school can be a crow" (teacher of De Kleine Icarus in Ghent; school offers Het Kraaiennest, an enrichment class for CSF learners at this school)

"You don't have to put a label on a CSF student to recognize that this student has a learning need" (representative of a learning support center)

During the interviews conducted in the context of the Thinkers' Cycle, different stakeholder groups referred to a needs-based approach to CSF learner identification and support, which is in line with the differentiation paradigm on CSF presented in section 1.1 of this Position paper. But the specific needs often remained unclear, as did the identification process and how it could be validated. Moreover, the purpose of the identification remained unclear. Increasing well-being, social skills, executive functions, motivation as well as offering appropriate challenges were often mentioned as goals. Improving performance and cognitive talent development were mentioned

less spontaneously, which could indicate that supporting performance and excellence is receiving less attention.

"Girls hide and make mistakes on purpose, including in IQ tests" (representative of a private center)

Within the care continuum used in (special) education, learner guidance centers, and learning support centers, the expansion of care is aimed at learners with learning and behavioral problems and disabilities for whom basic care and increased care are not sufficient. However, there is no explicit mention of CSF learners, which increases the risk of them being overlooked. The M-circle developed within the Catholic Education Network offers a structured instrument for solution-oriented educational guidance and intervention, which can help identify and respond to the needs of learners, including CSF learners. The starting point of CSF identification is often the occurrence of problems, which causes an overrepresentation of identified boys. Identifying learners with a minority background, such as learners with a migration background and/or from families with a low SES, is extra difficult. These learners often face lower expectations from teachers and lower grades, and the available identification materials underestimate their cognitive potential (De Leersnyder, 2017).

"Many gifted students are not noticed and helped, but as long as there is no problem, no action is taken" (representative higher education)

Identification of CSF in university and non-university higher education is also a problem. These institutions have a well-established inclusive, needs-based approach to identifying students for whom the pace of learning is too fast for one reason or another, but not for CSF students for whom it is too slow. In higher education, too, the identification of CSF students remains a challenge that deserves more attention.

Based on these reflections, we make the following recommendations to improve the identification of CSF learners from all levels of education in Flanders (see also Box 3):

- **Actively and timely look for potential in all learners**, while recognizing their social background. CSF learners deserve opportunities to explore and demonstrate their potential. It is important to provide stimulating and encouraging learning opportunities that enable this exploration before identifying this potential ('First nurture, then find!'). This is especially important for CSF learners who have been given fewer learning opportunities up to that point. In addition, identification strategies based on potential, strength and performance should complement current approaches so that identification occurs before problems arise.
- **Broadened talent domains:** Mathematics and Dutch are often considered the main talent domains; other domains, such as physics, history, or social sciences, are at risk of being overlooked.
- **Professionalize identification.** Clarify the concept of 'needs-based' identification and its objectives, and establish clear criteria for identification.
- **Use the good tools available.** There is a lack of knowledge about tests for measuring intelligence and cognitive ability, and misconceptions circulate that prevent their responsible use. The handbook "Developing cognitive talent" from Project Talent contains a lot of useful information on this subject and this Project

also provides lectures and e-learning on the subject. The Prodia protocol offers a good combination of psychological and educational identification approaches and makes many suggestions at the different levels of care. In short, **strive for the existing good information and tools on CSF learners to be available in all learner guidance centers, educational support services, etc. and schools.**

- **Develop tools for identifying CSF learners from minority backgrounds, and ensure that these tools meet the specific requirements for this target group** (e.g. collecting local or group-specific standards for available tests; using observations and/or interviews; identifying through learning potential tests rather than static ability tests; 'frontloading' and 'response to intervention', in which CSF learners are identified by first offering challenging learning opportunities to them and looking at how they respond to them and learn from them).
- Teachers are crucial in identifying CSF learners, but without the necessary specific training and support, they cannot. Therefore, **specific trainings and materials to support teachers' diagnostic competencies need to be developed and evaluated.** The observation tool "kijkwijzer" of the Project Talent, which will be validated in 2026, is a good example.
- In order to improve the identification of CSF learners in Flanders, it is important to **evaluate the identification processes used** and to find out who is currently identified or excluded and why. Useful research has already been done on teachers' judgments (e.g., Lavrijsen & Verschueren, 2020) and on learners from minority groups (e.g., Agirdag & De Leersnyder, 2024), but more systematic data is needed.

2.5 *Parents' associations, private centers for diagnosis and counselling*

Interviews conducted with parents and professionals from private centers for diagnosis and guidance of CSF learners as part of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle showed that in recent years there has been great pressure to "take action" themselves. In some cases, this pressure was accompanied by great psychological suffering. Parents reported on their CSF children's lack of understanding and challenge at school, the ambivalence, stress, and loneliness their children experience at school, which is supported by research results from Project Talent (Ramos et al., 2024). Parents reported that their children did not receive proper instruction or support from their teachers. Some CSF children were given opportunities to work individually at school, according to the parents. But, like every learner, CSF learners also need the right instruction and the personal contacts that go with it. And compensatory measures, such as 'extraordinary' education that is organized by private centers during or after school hours especially for CSF learners, have the problem that they come with a hefty price tag, making these extra educational opportunities for CSF learners highly dependent on their socioeconomic background.

"The challenges that CSF learners are faced with are not real challenges, but just more of the same"

"If CSF learners are given an extra task that they have to and can do all by themselves, they hardly learn anything" (representatives of parents of CSF learners)

"Education is free, but unfortunately not for those children who cannot get their money's worth at school and are forced to seek help outside of it" (representatives of parents of CSF learners)

As a result of the above-mentioned increased social pressure, in Flanders we have seen an increase in the number of private centers for diagnosis and guidance of CSF learners in recent years, which partially address the gaps in the education and care system with regard to identification of CSF, support of and education of CSF learners, counselling of parents, training for teachers and other professionals, and advocacy. However, there are no specific initiatives for CSF learners with low socioeconomic status or a migrant background, who are even less likely to be identified and supported.

"There are many children with special needs and the group of CSF children is at the back of the queue"...

"You have to fight to get something done for your CSF child" (representatives of parents of CSF learners)

Special attention and care deserve the exceptional CSF learners and their parents. They struggle with even more worries and experience even more stress, but often encounter even more misunderstanding, even from parents of non-exceptional CSF learners. Several parents of exceptional CSF learners who were spoken to in the context of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle reported on the suffering and traumas that their children had experienced at school. Sometimes this went so far that these children had to be referred to special education or that home education remained as the only solution, at least for parents who had the necessary means to do so. The choice of these parents for home education for their (exceptional) CSF children was therefore often not a positive choice. Rather, it was the last solution they saw, after years of great concern about their child's trajectory in mainstream education, about the difficult relationship with their peers or classmates, and frustration about the numerous failed attempts to talk to the school about their CSF child and search for solutions within the school. These parents therefore strongly called for the establishment of special classes or schools for these exceptionally fast progressing learners (see, for example, the open letter that Spring-stof sent on 3 April 2025 to the Minister of Education and several other Flemish politicians, entitled: 'Why Spring-stof, a special project for exceptionally gifted children is now needed').

"Parents of other gifted children then say: that this is not exceptional giftedness, you show off your child too much" Or: "You are pushing your child too much; act normal" ...

"Gifted children do not seem to exist in the eyes of many people" (representatives parents of (exceptionally) gifted learners)

We acknowledge that the above comments and reflections do not necessarily paint a complete and objective picture of the problems of the (exceptional) CSF learners in Flemish education. But there is no doubt that the cries of these parents should be listened to more and that these learners deserve better support. We therefore make the following recommendations:

- **Parents need easily accessible, evidence-based information about (exceptional) CSF learners** and they need to be better informed about the information available. Parents often inform themselves via social media, but there is a lack of quality control and misconceptions are thriving. Private centers and

commercial institutions also do not have quality control and they do not always provide 'evidence-based' information about CSF learners.

- For some exceptional CSF learners, **'extraordinary' education in special groups may** be necessary. This can include summer schools, pull-out programs, or special classes with full-time grouping.
- Gaps in the education and care system for CSF learners are currently partly filled by private initiatives. However, this private offer is pricey and not well spread geographically. **These gaps in the system must be closed** (see section 2.1: Responsibilities and professionalization) so that **the educational opportunities of (exceptional) CSF learners become less dependent on their family characteristics** and to **better guarantee the quality of** the content conveyed and educational care provided.
- There must be room in all schools for open and appreciative communication about how to deal with CSF learners, such as round table discussions that ensure the exchange and cooperation between parents and schools, with the support of the learner guidance centers.

2.6 Research

Most of the research on CSF learners in Flanders is done within Project/Expertise Center Talent. Among other things, research is being done into the beliefs of teachers regarding CSF (Elke Struyf, Katelijne Barbier and Vincent Donche, University of Antwerp), the motivation and commitment of CSF learners and the role of parental education and teacher-learner interactions (Bart Soenens, Maarten Vansteenkiste, Anne-Fleur Bogaert, UGent, Jeroen Lavrijsen, Karine Verschueren, Alicia Ramos, KU Leuven), the underachievement of CSF learners (Alicia Ramos, Jeroen Lavrijsen, Karine Verschueren, KU Leuven; Sabine Sypré, Bart Soenens, Maarten Vansteenkiste, UGent), vulnerable groups of CSF learners (Femke Vandenbroucke, Alicia Ramos, Karine Verschueren, KU Leuven), social relationships with peers (Sofie Hendrix, Alicia Ramos, Karine Verschueren, KU Leuven) (see ppw.kuleuven.be/talent). Outside the Project Talent network, research is carried out into CSF learners and mathematics in nursery and primary education (Bert De Smedt, KU Leuven).

Despite the great impact of and appreciation for this scientific work, also internationally, conversations with these researchers in the context of the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle showed that the scientific knowledge base on CSF still has many gaps. There is still work to be done on the identification of CSF learners, among other things. There is a need for more domain- and context-specific definitions and operationalizations of cognitive talent, which take into account the nature and requirements of the learner's educational program and setting (Wouter Duyck, Ghent University) and broaden the concept to the top level in various content domains. The researchers further agreed that they need to put more effort into bringing the results and implications of their research into classroom practice. But they realized that this is a long-term process. Finally, they were concerned about the limited funding possibilities of research in this field.

In general, a lot of educational research is done in Flanders and that research is also well regarded internationally. Relative to this, research into CSF learners is rather

scarce. This was also evident at the last biennial conference of the internationally leading European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI 2025) in Graz. In his opening lecture, conference chairman Roland Grabner explicitly pointed out that research, also within EARLI, focuses too little on the development of the potential of learners. The motto of the conference was therefore 'Realizing Potentials through Education: Shaping Minds and Brains for the Future'. There is hence a need for more scientific research into the learning needs and support of CSF learners, also in Flanders.

Based on the above, we have the following suggestions for research around CSF:

- **Processes and criteria for identification.** How can we set up reliable and valid assessments in specific groups? How can we ensure that these instruments are used effectively in practice?
- **Effectiveness Study.** It is important to investigate effects of programs for CSL at the level of the individual learners, including their impact on their learning performance and the development of their learning potential. Furthermore, important educational reforms should be supported with longitudinal research specifically aimed at CSF learners and addressing research questions such as:
 - What do demanding learning objectives and a knowledge-rich curriculum entail in the various fields of study, how are they implemented for CSF learners and with what result?
 - How are the results of central tests used for CSF learners and what are the effects?
 - How can we better identify and support CSF learners from vulnerable backgrounds?
 - How can we better identify and support "doubly special" learners?
- **Longitudinal research on talent development in domains.** The researchers of Project Talent have already done a lot of relevant research into talent development and the role of the social and learning environment and motivating factors in it. However, there are still important unresolved questions such as:
 - What are universal mechanisms of learning, what are specific mechanisms of the development of talent in specific domains?
 - What kind of mechanisms nurture and promote excellence? How can they be applied in education?
- **Systematic monitoring system.** . To improve education, it would be important to carry out a systematic assessment of soft indicators such as self-image, motivation and growth mindset, and information about how well learners are doing in schools. To quote Prof. Maarten Vansteenkiste (Ghent University): *"Central tests concern learning outcomes ... But the question is: what is the engine for achieving excellent learning outcomes? What is the driving force behind it?"*
- Finally, we would like to argue for an **interdisciplinary research consortium** on CSF learners and talent development in which the forces available in Flanders from psychology (e.g. school psychology, developmental psychology, talent development, cognitive psychology, motivational psychology), educational science (e.g. teacher training, general didactics, teaching methodology, instructional technology, educational effectiveness) and possibly other disciplines, such as sociology or economy, are joined.

2.7 *Transfer*

Transfer of knowledge and information between research, policy, and practice is crucial for successful and sustainable support of CSF learners. During the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle, many important stakeholders from these three domains were spoken to and we noticed a lot of openness and interest in the theme of 'care for talent'. Moreover, an extensive network has been built up within the Talent Project in which the three above-mentioned domains are represented, and a sounding board group has also been formed in which representatives of the three areas participate. As far as the transfer is concerned, a lot of useful structures are already available and connections have been made.

Transfer from research to practice and vice versa: Existing infrastructures such as the learner guidance centers, educational support centers, learning support centers, Talent Centers and private centers around CSF learners can play an important role here. However, it must be ensured that the expertise on CSF is sufficiently present in these structures, and this is not always the case. Project Talent is an important and successful strategic partnership between research and practice (and policy) in the field of CSF. Leerpunt, which was founded in 2022 with the aim of strengthening educational practice through scientific insights, certainly also offers opportunities for this transfer. For example, the Talent Expertise Center was recently commissioned by Leerpunt to make a review study for educational practice on effective educational adaptations for CSF learners.

Transfer from policy to practice and vice versa is important to structurally anchor the theme of CSF learners in educational practice. That is why official attainment targets, educational objectives, and curricula must also be drawn up and formulated from the perspective of CSF learners. The EU expert Marco Montanari, who was interviewed about this as part of the Thinkers' Cycle, stated that "in the midst of the many other problems that schools and education have, the attention for CSF is often snowed under". There are other aspects around which transfer from policy to practice is needed, such as: including the theme of CSF learners in the basic training of teachers, ensuring quality control, and including the CSF perspective in important reforms of the education and care system. In the interview with Prof. Elke Struyf (University of Antwerp), author of the report "Evolution towards schools for everyone" (2024), we learned that, although mainstream schools receive support from learning support centers and special education, this expertise is currently not integrated into the care system of mainstream schools. This does not work efficiently. That is why the Inclusive Education Committee argues in the above-mentioned report (2024) for fully inclusive education by 2040. The plan is to integrate this expertise into mainstream education and to set up multidisciplinary teams that can promote adapted education for learners who need specific care. Within these multidisciplinary teams, it will be important to also include expertise in CSF, as this is currently not part of the competence or focus of the learning support centers and special education. This is an opportunity not to be missed!

Transfer between research and policy and vice versa ensures, on the one hand, that education on CSF is based on the best available scientific insights, and, on the other hand, that scientific research in this field is relevant and useful.

Box 5. Lessons from the German LemaS project regarding transfer

- Change in schools takes a lot of time!
- Transfer needs a third party to organize and supervise the process.
- School networks are important and teachers need extra resources and time to meet, work on joint projects, etc.
- It cannot be assumed that acquired competencies will remain in the field; Measures must be taken to ensure sustainability. It is a continuous process.
- Schools must be able to adapt developed materials etc. to their situation, which makes effectiveness research challenging, but quality control is necessary because concepts can be 'lost' along the way in practice.
- Policy plays a crucial role in the structural anchoring of the theme.
- Transfer is a research theme in itself!

Based on these reflections, we formulate the following recommendations regarding transfer:

- Make sure that all those who need to have expertise in CSF receive the necessary and correct knowledge. This knowledge transfer requires a **permanent center of expertise** that is specifically aimed at CSF learners and shares knowledge with relevant educational actors (such as the Knowledge Center for Giftedness in the Netherlands). Today, this knowledge sharing in Flanders is realized by the Talent Expertise Center within the CSF Support Policy (e.g., Talent platform, Newsletter), but it is not clear what will happen if this project were to end.
- Teacher training programs would benefit from a **common core curriculum** that standardizes central terminology and core content. **Expertise about CSF learners must be guaranteed in all support services in education (learner guidance centers, educational support centers, learning support centers)**, preferably in the form of a core or expertise team.
- Successful transfers can benefit from the use of third-party expertise. The experience with the German LEMAS project has shown that without the efforts of third parties, the concepts, expertise and realizations built up are in danger of being lost in the long run.
- **Also try to reach the schools in Flanders that do not (yet) participate in the learning networks of the CSF Support Policy.** If this does not work, there is a threat of a *"Matthew effect at school level with regard to CSF learners"*, according to Pedro De Bruyckere (General Director of Leerpunt).
- It may be useful to **set up a transfer consortium** that includes all stakeholders - learners, parents, practitioners, researchers and policymakers - and meets regularly (e.g. annually).

3. Conclusion and outlook

As far as the identification and support of CSF learners is concerned, Flanders has a number of assets, specific resources, and opportunities, but it also faces challenges.

Achievements, assets, opportunities and challenges

During the KVAB Thinkers' Cycle, we met many very well-informed and engaged stakeholders and organizations, at all levels of education and within all sectors of care. Awareness of the need for systematic support for CSF learners among policymakers has increased significantly, as evidenced by the investment of resources for the CSF Support Policy and the fact that the Flemish decree framework has been adapted in important respects to better meet the educational needs of CSF learners. A framework for diagnostic decision-making and good diagnostic material is available thanks to the protocols developed within Prodia. The Talent Expertise Center has carried out a great deal of research on CSF that is of great importance to Flanders and enjoys international recognition, has already built up a large network of schools and other actors involved, and has disseminated knowledge, materials and tools with the educational field via the Talent platform, newsletters and study days. Within the CSF Support Policy, anchor schools share their knowledge and practical expertise with other schools and strengthen the evidence base of their own practices. Educational support centers also explicitly put the CSF theme on the agenda. Many Flemish educational and care institutions – from kindergarten education to higher education – have a CSF policy or are working on it. Various private centers, which often also maintain good contacts with the above-mentioned network, take care of CSF learners who, for one reason or another, cannot count on sufficient advice and support in the regular system of education and care. Leerpunt offers opportunities for broader transfer of scientific knowledge and good practices in Flemish education.

The Flemish education system has several **assets** to make the care for CSF learners a success. The system of combined nursery and primary schools, which is widespread in Flanders, offers great potential for early identification and continuous follow-up and support of CSF learners (including smooth progression, good exchange between teachers from both levels of education, smooth implementation of acceleration and/or enrichment in specific domains for CSF learners). Secondary education offers many opportunities for talent development and is very open in terms of access to higher education. Almost every secondary school diploma gives access to higher education (except for studies in medicine, dentistry, some art schools), home education is allowed, central exams are well developed and available to everyone. There is an extensive system of guidance and care (e.g. learner guidance centers, educational support services, learning support centers, private centers, etc.). In universities and colleges, there is a growing awareness that CSF students deserve special attention and care and initiatives are being taken to this end. According to a recent OECD comparison, annual education expenditure per student is relatively high and higher than, for example, in Germany or the Netherlands. Finally, the fact that the KVAB has devoted a Thinkers' Program and a Position paper to the CSF theme indicates the recognition of its social importance for Flanders.

However, there are also **challenges** with regard to the support of CSF learners in Flanders. In Flemish education, the relationship between the socioeconomic status of learners and their learning performance (the so-called *socioeconomic gradient*) is one of the largest of all OECD countries. The learning outcomes of learners are declining in Flanders, as shown by international studies and Flemish assessment tests. The same can be found in several other European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands; however, the losses are greater in Flanders and affect both the lower and upper percentiles of the student population, as international education expert Dirk Van Damme has repeatedly emphasized. In addition, there is an increasing number of learners in special education, early school leavers, learners who are excluded from school (sometimes at a very young age), and learners who are forced to follow home education.

In a longitudinal study by Project Talent, which ran from primary to higher education, the researchers found a significant number of learners in the group of top 10% of learners in the field of cognitive skills who underperformed or who showed a maladaptive motivation profile, especially in secondary education and the transition period from secondary to higher education (Ramos et al., 2019; 2023). Thus, there seems to be a discrepancy between the needs and abilities of CSF learners and the learning opportunities and challenges that education offers them, and this gap is even greater for exceptional CSF learners. Their potential is insufficiently recognized, they do not experience sufficient learning gains, do not learn how to learn and are not sufficiently challenged, which leads to an overall loss of talent. This loss is probably not easy to fix and has many causes, including:

- The attainment targets and objectives are too low to offer sufficient challenge for CSF learners as well. *"The attainment targets are intended as minimum goals, but are de facto used as reference points for the education of all learners,"* says international education expert Dirk Van Damme.
- The strong focus on equal educational opportunities and on the well-being of learners has led to a misunderstanding of the value of cognitive learning performance and excellence.
- The current teacher shortage reduces the limited resources and space available to support CSF learners.
- Knowledge about CSF is not yet generally available among all teachers, learner guidance centers, and other learning or educational support staff.
- Schools and teachers have a high degree of autonomy and school leaders play a central role. As a result, it sometimes depends on individual insights and preferences whether or not attention is paid to CSF learners in a class or at a school.
- Learners from vulnerable backgrounds encounter additional obstacles in the Flemish education system, which curtails their chances of success.

In Flanders, the versatility and complexity of the system of guidance and care increases the risk of diffusion of responsibility for CSF learners. A number of recent educational reforms pose **risks** for CSF learners that need to be taken into account. The introduction of central tests, which are intended as a measure of the quality of the school, entails the risk that schools will align their education with these tests and therefore focus education less on those learners who will already achieve a high result on those tests. A

knowledge-rich curriculum that 'raises the bar for everyone' may not yet offer enough of a challenge for (exceptional) CSF learners. Finally, the major educational reform towards an inclusive school concept will require a lot of time and energy from all actors in the education sector. The combination of the aforementioned reforms could lead to – again – paying particular attention to the weaker learners. After all, *"the changes will require additional resources anyway and there is a danger that CSF students will be the first to fall by the wayside,"* said Pedro de Bruyckere (General Director of Leerpunt). On the other hand, the transition to 'Schools for everyone' in Flemish education offers opportunities to improve education for CSF learners as well. But this will only be possible if there is also sufficient expertise in the field of CSF within the multidisciplinary care teams to be set up.

CSF learners and talent development are relatively new domains of research, policy, and practice. So not only are there knowledge gaps in education, but there is also structural underrepresentation of these themes in research. There is a lack of systematically embedded standards for identification and support of CSF learners, a lack of systematic documentation of CSF programs, and a lack of guidelines for teacher training curricula. There also seems to be a lack of systematic quality control with regard to CSF learners, which was already cited in the Report of the Better Education Commission (Brinckman and Versluys, 2021), which recommended that the extent to which a school challenges CSF learners – and by extension all learners – should be made a fixed element in the evaluations of schools by the Flemish Education Inspectorate.

Finally, focusing on CSF learners and talent development can stimulate the development of schools in general, because knowledge-rich, high-quality, and challenging education and instructional strategies that focus on the strengths of each learner help to realize the potential of all children. In other words, it does not create new selective privileges, but on the contrary ensures social mobility, according to international education expert Dirk Van Damme and Prof. Wouter Duyck (Ghent University). Developing the potential of all learners, including those who function (exceptionally) strongly in the cognitive domain, in a fair and equitable way and regardless of their sociocultural background, is not a luxury, but is the core task of education.

Recommendations in a nutshell

1. All learners have cognitive potential, but there are large interindividual differences in potential and in resulting learning performance. High potential is not a problem, but something positive that we should cherish. This has nothing to do with elitism.
2. To discover and realize their cognitive potential, CSF learners must be provided with opportunities, encouragement, assistance, and instruction that aligns with their learning abilities and needs throughout their learning journey.
3. The recognition, stimulation, and support of CSF children and youngsters, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, also contributes substantially to social cohesion and justice and ensures overall sustainable social progress.
4. In order to optimally support CSF children and youngsters, timely and good identification is of great importance. Cognitive strength manifests itself in many

forms, can evolve over time and is accompanied by a wide range of personal characteristics.

5. Good support for CSF learners requires adapted learning paths with accelerating, enriching, and/or deepening learning opportunities, both within and outside the regular classroom and school context. A flexible alternation or combination of support measures works best.
6. An important breakthrough in education and care for CSF learners came in 2020, when the Flemish Government made specific and substantial investments in it for the first time. This Support Policy for CSF learners has been extended until 2028. To safeguard and further implement this policy, government support will continue to be needed after 2028.
7. Valuable tools for the diagnosis and support of CSF learners have been developed, but they are not yet sufficiently anchored in the Flemish education and care system.
8. Because teachers and other care providers are crucial in the identification and support of CSF learners, investments should be made in their professionalization in this area, through high-quality and affordable pre-service and in-service training.
9. The care for and support of CSF learners should be structurally included in all levels of education, in the counselling services of learners and schools, and in the external quality control by the Education Inspectorate.
10. The recently announced educational reform towards inclusive education and the accompanying plan to set up a multidisciplinary team within inclusive schools for learners who need specific care also offers opportunities for improving the approach to CSF learners, provided that these teams also provide expertise in the field of CSF.
11. The increasing number of private centers for the diagnosis and support of CSF children and youngsters and sometimes also for the guidance of schools in the development of a CSF policy, fills a gap, especially with regard to exceptional CSF children and youngsters. However, their offer is often pricey and there is no external quality control.
12. All stakeholders must stand up for the interests of CSF learners, with special attention to CSF learners with vulnerable background characteristics.

We make a warm appeal to all those involved to work together with the insights and recommendations from this KVAB Position paper.

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Attachments

Appendix 1

Coordination Committee

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Lieven Verschaffel, Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts, Class of Humanities and Social Sciences, coordinator

Karine Verschueren, External expert, KU Leuven, coordinator

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Inge Loomans, Flemish Department of Education

Sabine Sypré, researcher and professional in the field of cognitively highly functioning students

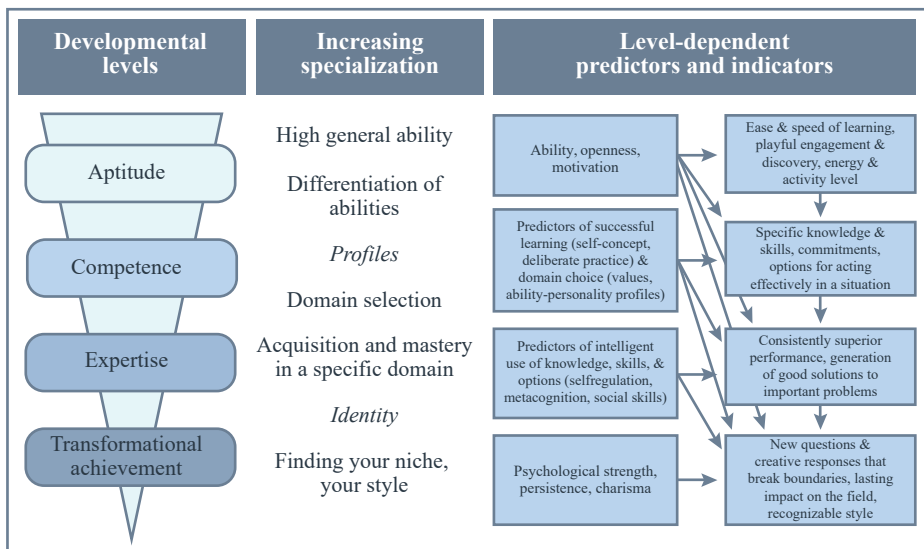
Dirk Van Damme, international education expert

Annex 2

The TAD Framework for Talent Development in Performance Domains (TAD) (Preckel et al., 2020)

Theory and principles

The TAD framework is a general framework/framework that recognizes that different areas of performance, such as music, mathematics, or sports, differ in processes, predictors, and indicators of talent development. As the figure below shows, it describes talent development in four consecutive levels (column 1) with increasing specialization (column 2) and conceptualizes talent development as dependent on a multitude of factors whose relative importance can vary during the process of talent development (column 3). The framework is open to further development, such as the inclusion of differentiated assumptions about the role of genes or the environment, particularly in the process of domain-specific modelling. The role of these variables is explicitly recognized (Preckel et al., 2020) and in the framework they are reflected in the way the individual absorbs and responds to them (e.g., the individual's perception of available opportunities or to what extent he or she benefits from certain types of instruction). That is, the impact of these factors is viewed through the psychological lens of the person.



The main principles of the TAD framework are described below: levels of development, increasing specialization and level-dependent predictors and indicators.

Development levels

Within the TAD framework, the talent development process is structured into four sequential levels, which can be distinguished based on their respective requirements and expected outcomes, but the transitions between the levels are assumed to be continuous. The aptitude or potential level describes a phase prior to any formal instruction in a performance domain. The competency level describes a stage in which someone acquires the knowledge and skills related to a domain, which is usually done through instruction by teachers and/or coaches, additional programs and lessons, and extensive practice. The level of expertise represents a phase in which this competence is applied and further refined towards the boundaries of the field. The transformational level of performance denotes a stage in which individuals apply and communicate their expertise in a way that advances the field.

Increasing specialization

The TAD framework describes the talent development process as a development from potential, often characterized by general skills, to increasingly specific skills and competencies. To describe this specialization process, the TAD framework focuses on the following internal processes.

Differentiation of skills. In his investment theory, Cattell (1987) argued that fairly general, flexible skills are invested in the acquisition of specific knowledge or skills by using available learning opportunities. This differential investment leads to a differentiation of skills and to the development of more specific skills and knowledge structures over time.

The development of skills intertwined with other person-related psychological factors. Theories of intellectual development (e.g., Ackerman, 1996) state that skills and other person-related psychological factors develop along mutually causal lines. Of particular importance are so-called investment traits, such as the need for cognition. These traits determine when, where, and how people invest their time and effort in developing their skills and intellect (von Stumm & Ackerman, 2013). Investment characteristics support skills development. In turn, skill level determines the likelihood of success at a particular task, which increases interest in a task and motivation to work on it. Similar positive reciprocal effects have been found between academic performance and academic self-esteem (Wu et al., 2021). That is, the development of skills and, in particular, more specific skills or specialized knowledge and the development of investment characteristics, interests and values, or self-image, are interlinked in the context of talent development.

Profiles provide information about talent development. A process of differentiation of skills, intertwined with the development of other person-related psychological factors, leads to the formation of individual profiles as individual constellations of skills and competences, interests and values, or self-concepts. Within the TAD framework, these profiles are used to understand the specialization process, as an individual's profile is useful for predicting domain selection and the domain in which the individual performs best (e.g., Lubinski, 2016).

Level-dependent predictors and indicators

The TAD framework conceptualizes talent development as dependent on several factors, including environmental factors such as opportunity. In doing so, TAD focuses on person-related variables, including how individuals respond to and perceive their environment. These factors include, but are not limited to, cognitive abilities (e.g., general intelligence such as Spearman's g-factor and specific skills such as spatial reasoning), personal characteristics (e.g., need for cognition, conscientiousness), motivation variables (e.g., performance motivation, interests, values, self-image), and psychosocial skills (e.g., self-regulation) (Lipnevich et al., 2016).

The overall TAD framework includes somewhat generic predictive factors that are assumed to be important for talent development in various domains. At the predisposition level, these include general intelligence, openness and motivation to perform, as reflected in the ease and speed with which a person learns and the willingness to learn new content and skills. At the competence level, more specific predictive factors related to a domain and to learning success, cultivated by teachers and mentors in formal and informal settings, are gaining importance. These include conscientiousness, self-image, interests and values, and deliberate practice (Ackerman, 1996). At the level of expertise, learning and using skills is no longer sufficient and must be complemented by the intelligent application of acquired knowledge and skills. This change in output requires advanced metacognitive skills, social skills, and the use or creation of new opportunities. Finally, delivering transformational achievements that push the boundaries of a field requires high-level investment, which requires sustained motivation and psychological strength (Jarvin & Subotnik, 2014). At this level, it is also helpful to find or create a personal niche for your creative "brand" and make your work visible to others, which is reinforced by a range of characteristics sometimes referred to as "charisma" (Phaneuf et al., 2016).

The TAD framework considers talent development to be a cumulative process in which the relative importance of predictive factors varies according to the level of talent development. Some variables, such as general intelligence, can be important from the start and remain important throughout the person's developmental journey (Reeve & Bonaccio, 2011). Others, such as metacognitive skills, may become more important as the person develops from beginner to advanced student or professional (Dent & Koenka, 2016). Potential, therefore, is defined dynamically as the set of psychological factors in an individual that interact with goal-oriented or contingent factors to indicate the likelihood of a positive progress in performance to the next level. Giftedness, in turn, includes a very high potential to grow to the next level.

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Cognitively strong functioning children and youngsters form a diverse group with unique educational needs, talents and vulnerabilities. Yet their potential in Flanders is too often underutilized, and their needs are insufficiently recognized and responded to. This Position wants to change that.

Starting from current scientific insights and a multifaceted questioning of the Flemish educational reality in this regard, this Position Paper offers a critical analysis of the state of affairs of the educational interaction with cognitively highly functioning children in Flanders and a nuanced framework for the optimization of this situation. The focus is not only on cognitive excellence, but also on inclusion and well-being. Strong cognitive functioning is approached as a dynamic interplay of capacities, motivation, context and guidance — and not as a fixed label.

This Position Paper deliberately builds a bridge between research, policy and the practice of education. It provides concrete recommendations for schools, teacher training programs, pupil and school counselling services, private care providers, parents, and policymakers, and makes clear what preconditions are needed to provide optimal and sustainable support for cognitively strong pupils. Attention is paid to differentiation, deepening, enrichment, acceleration, professionalization and various forms of cooperation with parents and external partners.

With this Position Paper, the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts underlines the importance of a substantiated, coherent and future-oriented policy on cognitively strong functioning in Flanders. The document invites reflection, dialogue and action, and aims to contribute to an educational landscape in which every talent is seen, recognized and developed to the maximum.

An indispensable guideline for anyone who wants to help shape strong, just and ambitious education in Flanders.

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