

## Cultural region of Belgium | sample answer

**Q: 'Describe and explain the importance of culture in defining any region studied by you' (2010 Q4 C.)**

Culture is the term used to describe the way of life of a group of people and includes things like language, religion etc. **Belgium** has a multicultural society.

The culture in Belgium is quite unusual because there are 3 national languages spread throughout the country. This has had a huge effect on social, political and cultural factors in the region.

Northern Belgium is called Flanders and this region speaks Flemish. This region used to be a small farming area but now it is a rich industrial region.

Southern Belgium is called Wallonia and French is spoken here. Wallonia was once a rich coal-mining area. It is now struggling to compete for new industries and has a high level of unemployment.

In many countries there is an official language with various dialects. In the case of Belgium the fact that there are two completely different languages and cultures living under the same roof there has been political divide between the south (Wallonia) and the north (Flanders).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Wallonia was the focus of the industrial revolution and held the balance of power in the country. This region was defined by its French culture.

From the 1950s the industrial heartland of Wallonia started to decline. The coal industry collapsed and the last coal mine closed in Sambre Meuse Valley in 1984. This caused further conflict between regions because Wallonians became resentful of the new industry increase in the coastal locations and around.

Since the 1950s the birth rate of Flanders has been higher and Flemings now account for 60% of the population (6 million).

The Flemings are demanding more political power and the Wallonians are more conscious of their minority standings. This is a big political struggle; people in both sides of the language divide do not often visit each other's regions.

In recognition of language and cultural differences, the government has set up 3 admin regions each to deal with their own educational, social and cultural affairs.

The 3 regions are the Flemish north, Wallonia south and German east. In these regions shops, schools, universities and marriage partners are often based on language.

The capital city of Belgium is Brussels. Brussels is in the Flanders region yet 85% of its population speaks French. This is a good example to show how bizarre the culture is in Brussels. It also shows how well defined a region can be because of culture.

Although the majority speak French, the city is growing and it is gaining more and more Flemish speakers but officially it is a bilingual city.