Regulating the programme supply in higher education

A comparative analysis

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Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 The Dutch policy context regarding the regulation of the programme supply

In the past decade the issue of the regulation of the programme supply is high on the political agenda in the Netherlands. Whereas the Dutch government intended, following the 1985 white paper *Higher Education Autonomy and Quality*, to increase the higher education institutions' autonomy to set up new programmes, Dutch Parliament more or less forced the then Minister to take measures to curb the perceived proliferation of the programme supply (Huisman, 1997). In the 1993 Higher Education and Research Act the concept of macro-efficiency was introduced and the Committee for the Programme Supply (ACO) was set up to watch over the efficiency of the supply.

In case a higher education institution (either university or *hogeschool*) intended to start a new programme eligible for state funding – either a programme already existing at another higher education institution, or a completely new programme – they were supposed to seek advice from the ACO. Annually, the ACO would judge the proposals sent in by the institutions. The institutions themselves could proceed by requesting the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to start a programme. The Minister was supposed to follow the advice of the ACO; s/he might deviate from this advice but has to explain such departures in Parliament. After approval of the Minister, the programme would be taken up in the Register of Higher Education Programmes (CROHO), implying state funding, the legal recognition of the degree and financial support for enrolling students. Whereas the initial task of the ACO was to judge whether the introduction of a particular programme X at a specific higher education institution Y would be efficient given the existing programmes X and related programmes Z at other institutions, through time the ACO's task changed somewhat. At the end of the 1990s, the ACO was supposed to answer the following two questions: is the quality of the programme sufficient and does the start of the programme not harm the transparency of the supply? (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, 1999). Another important change was that the HBO Council (the buffer organisation in the *hogescholen* sector) complemented the ACO procedure with self-regulating measures within the sector prior to the submission of proposals of *hogescholen* to the ACO (Huisman & Jenniskens, 2000). In fact, this form of self-regulation was an attempt to make up for the higher education institutions' omission to follow the legal imperative to "take into account an efficient allocation of tasks across the higher education institutions".

With the recent abolition of the ACO and the introduction of accreditation, the question how to take care of the macro-efficiency of the supply is still/back on the table. The policy letter *Efficient Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, 2003) sketches the short-term policy, in which the potential of new programmes to the further development of the Dutch knowledge economy plays a considerable role. For the longer term, the 2004 *Higher Education and Research Plan* will set out the policy agenda.

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

For developing the policy agenda regarding the regulation of the programme supply, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences would like to be informed about the regulations in a number of other higher education systems. The Ministry therefore commissioned the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), University of Twente, to investigate the following question:

How have relevant higher education systems given shape to the regulation of the programme supply?

- The general question can be broken down in five sub-questions:
- What is the government's rationale (steering philosophy) regarding the regulation of the programme supply?
- Which instruments are used to regulate the programme supply?
- Which instruments are used to regulate the start of new programmes?
- How do higher education institutions make use of/react to these instruments?
- Which policy debates are taking place regarding the programme supply?

1.3 Structure of the report

The following chapters present the answers to the questions for the higher education systems involved: Scotland, Flanders, Denmark, Australia and Finland. These countries have been chosen on the basis of a mix of criteria: variation in terms of centralisation/decentralisation of the regulation, geographical location, and size of the system.

Introduction

The questions have been answered by an analysis of the relevant documents (policy papers, regulations) and by consulting experts in the respective countries. We would like to thank our informants for sharing the available information and for commenting on the drafts of the country reports.

2. Scotland

2.1 Introduction

The Scottish higher education system (part of the British system) consists of twenty-one higher education establishments: thirteen universities, the Open University, one university college, two colleges of higher education, two art schools, a conservatoire and an agricultural college. There are about 180,000 students enrolled in the system, 28% studying part-time, 17% studying at postgraduate level.

The general governmental approach to higher education can be qualified as steering by the market. Until the 1980s, the institutional self-governance model was in force, characterised by governmental non-interference and much academic autonomy. From then on, many market elements have been introduced by the governments, in fact implying that government increased its influence over the system by using the power of the purse as an important instrument, e.g. by allocating funds based on research quality (Gornitzka *et al*., 1999; Theisens, 2003).

2.2 The main priorities of the government

Throughout the UK, thus including Scotland, the main rationale regarding higher education in the last fifteen years was to increase (referring to the quantitative aspect of participation) and widen participation (referring to the qualitative aspect: increasing access of less-represented groups). The ultimate aim for 2010 is to achieve a participation rate of 50%. The rationale was based on the idea that a skilled and knowledgeable workforce is critical to the UK's ability to compete in the global economy, and that universities were to play a central role in 'producing' this workforce. Not only economic arguments were used, elements of creating/maintaining a democratic society, an education citizenry and social cohesion were mentioned as well (Callender, 2003, p. 130-131).

Whereas Scotland is scoring "better" than the UK average on a number of indicators regarding access, here also the stress is (still) on issues regarding participation. The most recent key policy priorities are: widening access and equality of opportunity; maintaining the quality of learning and teaching; maintaining and developing the quality of the research base and fully exploiting the potential for knowledge transfer; and developing the highest calibre of management and leadership and sound business processes (SHEFC website, 2003). That participation is not only governmental

rhetoric is visible in the strategies of the individual institutions. As of 2001, every higher education institution signed up a commitment to improve social inclusion (through fair admission, valuing all achievement, flexible learning, etc.) of students of a non-traditional background (Universities Scotland website, 2003).

2.3   The regulation of the programme supply

To achieve the main objectives of higher education policy, the government (particularly through the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, SHEFC) mainly uses financial instruments. Regarding the programme supply, it is important to note that the government not directly regulates the supply, but indirectly through its funding mechanisms and through the quality assurance system. As such there is no national regulation concerning the overall efficiency or transparency of the supply. The government and the institutions consider that the right to teach and the right to choose what to teach are part and parcel of academic autonomy, of course taking into account requirements of and validation by professional organisations.

2.3.1   Some data on the programme supply

The Universities & Colleges Admission Service (UCAS website, 2003) data reveal that there are some 3,600 courses in 1998 offered by the Scottish higher education institutions. This number is expected to have continued to grow in recent years, for the overall number of programmes in the UK as a whole grew from over 30,000 in 1996 to over 35,000 in 1998 and over 38,000 in 1999 at about 250 higher education institutions. The Joint Academic Coding System identifies some 700 subjects of academic study arranged into 19 categories. Note that the JACS is 'only' a coding system, allowing the identification of a specific study programme. The total number of different programme names is considerably higher.

As has been stated, there is no specific regulation from the Scottish administration regarding the programme supply, neither regarding the start of new programmes, nor regarding the overall efficiency or transparency of the supply.

2.3.2 Setting up new programmes

Higher education institutions are free to set up programmes, apart from some exceptions, i.e. programmes for which extraordinary investments are necessary (Medicine). In such cases, the government is involved in the decision-making procedures. Universities themselves are responsible for the (quality of the) programme they introduce. Internal validation and decision-making procedures are assumed to take into account quality requirements. Apart from that, starting new programmes is particularly based on strategic considerations of the universities.

2.3.3 Control over the (existing) supply

The national Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) evaluates and reports on the quality of subjects/courses at the university. There's both a financial penalty for low quality and a financial benefit – through the funding mechanisms of the SHEFC – in case the quality is high. In case the quality is persistently low (if two-three years after a QAA warning quality has not improved) funding can be withdrawn. It however hardly ever happens that the quality does not improve after a serious warning. It should be added that a serious warning from the QAA is often less earnest than that of the professions that threaten to deregister a professionally-oriented programme, implying that graduates will not be allowed to enter the profession. In sum, the quality assurance mechanisms imply an indirect and rather remote way of controlling the supply.

In addition to steering to some extent through quality, government regulates the number of student places. It annually sets the number of regular (full-time, undergraduate or specific graduate programmes, UK or EU based) student places for the system as a whole and for the thirteen funding subject groups for each institution and supports the eligible students financially by a loans and grants system. The institution will financially be penalised if the actual enrolment of regular students is (1.5-3%) below or above the limits set per subject group. The institutions may register non-regular students, but these students only pay fees, the government does not contribute. The SHEFC is the government's arms-length agency distributing the governmental budget across the higher education institutions (with the exception of the agricultural college). The largest share of the SHEFC's budget is for teaching grants and in fact all teaching costs are (supposed to be) covered by this budget. On average the teaching grant at present is about £ 4,500 per student per year, the grants varying from subject to subject.

The funding mechanism largely lacks the incentive to set up new programmes, for setting up a new programme (at least programmes intended for the 'traditional' student body) goes at the cost – giving the peculiarities of the funding system – of the enrolments in existing programmes. It may nevertheless be worthwhile to set up a programme that attracts 'non-traditional' students. The government has set up specific policy programmes to stimulate either courses that do so, or general activities of higher education institutions that contribute to the general widening of participation objectives.

Two of these specific instruments are the following. First, from 1999 on, the Wider Access Premium programme is in force. It funds wider access activities by granting an additional 5% (total about 5 Million pounds in the past years) above the unit of resource to support each student from a 'low participation neighbourhood'. Second, above the available student places, the government sets aside a number of extra, targeted places. In the last year, 730 (full-time equivalent) student places were reserved: 400 aimed at supporting the delivery of the key policy priorities, 230 for initial teacher education. Of the 400 places, 340 were meant to improve participation from specific socially deprived areas in Scotland, 50 were part of the New Access Partnership programme implying financial incentives to institutions that find imaginative and innovative ways of securing private sector investment for widening participation initiatives, and 10 places for taught postgraduate level engineering (SHEFC, 2002).

2.4   Institutions' responses

Given the policies and instruments in place, higher education institutions regularly carry out a portfolio analysis of their course supply. Less successful courses – in terms of enrolments and/or financial health – are critically analysed and either changed or dropped. Much change has to do with keeping up the institution's reputation and branding, institutions investigate (seriously by market research or more cursorily and based on interpretations and impressions) which changes would add to better selling their products.

The incentive to capture additional student places may seem low, for on average the number of extra places is marginal to the total amount of settled places. However, 10-20 extra student places allow the higher education institution to appoint extra staff and the extra student places contribute somewhat to the higher education institution's prestige and status.

2.5   Policy debate

There are hardly debates on the programme supply as such (also not on the instruments – the funding mechanisms – that indirectly affect the higher education institutions). One might wonder whether students do not get lost given the large amount of programmes available, but the (very) general pattern of student choice is firstly based on selecting a particular higher education institution and next on selecting a particular programme. As such, the seemingly broad range of choices available is then largely limited. In addition, there is considerable leeway for students to change their direction once they enter a university. The modularised system allows for much flexibility of choice, particularly in later years of the course.

Employers do not consider transparency as a problem. This can be attributed to the general idea that the disciplinary content and knowledge is a second-order issue. Employers are generally more interested in attitudes, basic knowledge and skills, and in how teaching is carried out.

3.   Flanders

3.1   Introduction

The Flemish system is a binary[1] system and consists of six universities and 22 *hogescholen*. Almost 158,000 students were enrolled in October 2002, most of these students are full-time students (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, website 2003).

The government's steering approach can be qualified by the concepts of stepping back and decentralisation. Particularly in the last decade a trend towards the market model is visible. The 1991 and 1994 decrees on the universities and *hogescholen* gave the institutions considerable autonomy. The government, however, is still involved in matters regarding e.g. the quality of education, the designation of study programmes, and the spending of the government budget (Van Heffen *et al.*, 1999).

3.2   The main priorities of the government

The most recent encompassing policy paper of the Flemish government lists the following policy priorities for education in general (*strategische doelstellingen*): reinvesting in education and training; combating social inequalities; optimising the programme supply; enhancing the esteem of teachers; and encouraging the direct participation of teachers, pupils, and parents (Vanderpoorten, 1999). Regarding higher education, the following issues are seen as most important: simplifying the regulations; optimising quality assurance; removing financial barriers, integrating information and communication technology, lifelong learning, and supporting higher education in the execution of its societal task.

3.3   The regulation of the programme supply in the recent past

The regulation of the programme supply is an important issue on the government's agenda. In fact, it is already an issue from the beginning of the 1990s on. The 1991 and 1994 decrees allowed institutions to set up new programmes only if another programme of the same institution was closed down. Furthermore, there were minimum enrolments set for programmes, e.g. 40 students in a first-cycle university programme (Huisman, 1997). Two related key issues were important in the past decade. First, the transparency of the programme supply in the university sector, and second, the rationalisation and optimisation of the programme supply. A lack of transparency was considered to be problematic for both potential employers of higher education graduates and for potential students

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[1] Although in terms of programmes (one-cycle *hogescholen*, two-cycle *hogescholen* and two-cycle university programmes), the present situation could also be called trinal.

looking for a study programme fitting their needs and wishes. In fact, the two key issues can be considered as sub-goals of the major objective to improve the quality of the programme supply (Van Heffen *et al.*, 1999, 140-145). The main concrete activities and attempts in the past decade regarding the supply of programmes related to setting up new programmes, improving existing programmes, merging of *hogescholen*, generalisation (*polyvalentie*) of first-cycle programmes, the closing down of poor quality programmes, and the integration of existing programmes. Efforts by former rector Dillemans to work out a plan for optimisation (e.g. Dillemans, 1997) have not been very successful, partly because the government particularly used 'soft' instruments (information and consultation) to achieve the goals. This was understandable: austere instruments – in theory more effective – would harm the higher education institutions' autonomy in the area of education. Nevertheless, Dillemans had achieved that representatives of the universities were at least sitting at one table discussing the

options regarding the optimisation. This might have led to some results, if the liberal successor of minister Van den Bossche (commissioning Dillemans), had not relieved him from his tasks. Shortly after, the rising debate on the introduction of the Bachelor Master structure overshadowed attention to one-shot optimisation à la Dillemans somewhat. Optimisation is still important, but in recent years more and more considered as a continuous process.

3.3.1   Some data on the programme supply

The new legislation (a consequence of the implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure), distinguishes nine study areas for the *hogescholen*, nine study areas (partly overlapping the former nine) for *hogescholen* associated with universities, and nineteen study areas for the universities. The existing study programmes – both the one- and two-cycle programmes – will be converted into the new Bachelor-Master structure. This process started in the year 2002-2003. Taking the pre-Bachelor-Master situation as a point of departure, there are about 150 different study programmes, of which some have recognised specialisations (e.g. the *hogeschool* one-cycle programme Audiovisual technology has four specialisations [*opties*]: assistance; camera-sound-editing; cinematography; and photography). In total there are about 470 programmes offered in Flanders. In the calculation of the number of different programmes and the total number of programmes, we did not count a subsequent second-cycle programme bearing the same name as a first-cycle programme as an autonomous programme.

3.3.2 Setting up new programmes and the control over the (existing) supply

In the new regulations, Flemish higher education institutions can start new programmes from 2006-2007 on. Proposals can be send in as of 2005, January 1. The Flemish government needs to recognise the programme and take it up in the *Hoger Onderwijsregister* (Higher Education Register) before the institution can offer the programme (i.e. receive funding and have the right to issue the degree). The programme needs the approval of the *Accreditatieorgaan* (Accreditation Organisation), which in fact implies a check on the quality of the programme. The Flemish government, in addition, applies the following macro-efficiency criteria: the new programme's relation to the existing supply; the number of students in the programme and/or similar programmes; the need for graduates of the programme and/or similar programmes; and the societal relevance of the programme. The government is supported in the judgement on the macro-efficiency by the *Erkenningscommissie* (Recognition Committee). This committee consists of national and international experts. The higher education field will be consulted in drawing up the committee (Vanderpoorten, 2003).

According to the new legislation, higher education institutions may exchange programmes, but the start of the programme still needs recognition following the above described procedures. Whether a light procedure in practice will be feasible in the case of an exchange of programmes remains to be seen.

The government considers the new legislation regarding the programme supply fitting the governmental approach of 'stepping back', although the higher education institutions view the new mechanisms partly as interference with academic freedom.

3.4 Institutions' responses to the new regulations

The *hogescholen* buffer organisation *Vlaamse Hogescholenraad* (Flemish *hogescholen* Council, VLHORA) has responded to the optimisation attempts in the late 1990s by setting up workgroups for the different sectors. A preliminary report appeared in 2001, proposing a number of changes in the names and contents of the programmes, most of these changes being fairly limited. However, before actually carrying out the changes, the VLHORA thought it wise to wait until the ideas on the Bachelor-Master structure were elaborated. In its response to the new legislation, the VLHORA did hardly touch upon issues relating to the new regulation of the programme supply. The same goes for

the *Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad* (Flemish Interuniversity Council, VLIR) that responded to the draft legislation in June 2002, hardly mentioning the procedures regarding macro-efficiency, the Recognition Committee, etc. (see also Peeters and Van Poucke, 2003).

3.5   Policy debate

The amount of change in the total supply of programmes has been relatively low in the past decade. There are a number of explanations for the relatively lack of change. First, the historical balance between the (ideological) educational networks (*netten)* has limited governmental action to incremental policies (Wielemans and Vanderhoeven, 1991). Second, recently there has been a fair amount of turmoil in the Flemish higher education sector, amongst other regarding the mergers in the *hogescholen* sector, which prevented the institutions somehow from setting up new programmes. Third, there is a lack of competition in many fields, particularly inhibited by the impossibility to offer programmes outside the higher education institution's own region. However, the relatively low amount of change is not considered problematic in the present policy debates.

Vanderpoorten (1999) discussed the issue of the optimisation of the programme supply. For the near future it is expected that universities and *hogescholen* have to reorganise their programme supply to cope with the needs of the knowledge society. Co-operation between institutions is a crucial element in order to rationalise the supply. The total supply should not grow; if new programmes are planned, others have to be abolished or integrated into other programmes. The government particularly desires and expects some change in the two-cycle programmes that are now offered by the *hogescholen* and in the future will be organised through associations between *hogescholen* and universities. Rigorous changes in the supply of one-cycle education (*hogescholen*) and university programmes are not envisaged. As the VLHORA and VLIR reactions above show, there seems to be hardly opposition to the new legislation, either a sign of acquiescence or expectant behaviour.

The student organisations seem to be most concerned about their role in decision-making procedures in the new legal situation, and not that much interested in issues of transparency and macro-efficiency. Employers, in general, continuously complain about the lack of communication and co-ordination on the relation between higher education and the labour market. This is particularly the case for the university sector (e.g. developing professional profiles

Flanders

[*beroepsprofielen*] is still a taboo, although there is a clear change in the universities' attitude, see e.g. the participation of Flemish universities in the Tuning project, website Tuning Project). With the development of profession profiles for *hogeschool* programmes, the relationship between employers and their organisations and the *hogescholen* has improved.

4. Denmark

4.1 Introduction

The Danish higher education system consists of a college and a university sector. The college sector contains about 150 institutions, some of them (about one third) offering short-cycle higher education, most of them (about two-thirds) offering medium-cycle professionally oriented programmes. The university sector contains 12 universities (including a relatively new IT-academy) and 21 specialist university-level institutions in architecture, art, music, etc. The university sector offers both medium- and long-cycle programmes. In total some 203,000 students enrol the higher education system nowadays (Vossensteyn, 2003). Most long-cycle programmes are structured along the lines of an undergraduate/graduate structure, bachelor and master degrees have already been implemented in the late 1980s (WRR, 1995), before the launch of the Bologna Declaration.

The government's general approach to higher education is based on granting more autonomy to the higher education institutions themselves. In the 1990s, funding mechanisms have changed (lump sum budget, based on an output-oriented funding model in which students passing exams) and the regulations were altered (framework act). At the same time, the idea of increasing autonomy is challenged by instances of government intervention, particularly in the area of accountability through the quality assurance system (Gornitzka *et al*., 1999).

4.2 The main priorities of the government

In the recent past, the policy documents such as *Better Education* (Ministry of Education[2], 2002a) and *The Danish approach to quality assurance* (Ministry of Education, 2002b) best describe the main priorities of government. The focus of recent policies is on: strengthening the use of information and communication technology; merging existing small institutions and improving co-operation between different types of programmes; discussing the possibility of implementing university performance contracts; and curriculum change. The issue of curriculum change encompasses a number of more specific actions, such as strengthening the relationships with employers (particularly in short-cycle higher education), clarifying the contents of programmes (a stress on taught competencies, taking into account the societal relevance of programmes, clarifying

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[2] There are in fact two ministries responsible for higher education: The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation is responsible for the university-level sector, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the other sectors of (higher) education.

the relationship between education and research), and increasing the flexibility of programmes (including the implementation of a credit transfer system, the introduction of a modular structure, and generally improving the transfer from one type of programme to another). Given all the changes envisaged, the existing Higher Education Act is recently adjusted.

4.3   The regulation of the programme supply in the recent past

The higher education institutions, particularly the universities, have always been relatively autonomous to organise their education. Recently, there have been some attempts to rearrange the supply. For instance, in the short-cycle higher education sector the 75 programmes have been reorganised into 15 programmes (e.g. agriculture; textile, clothing and design; food and process; finance; building and construction). The Ministry set out the restructuring policy, partly instigated by complaints of employers and their organisations. Nowadays, the programmes in this sector have about 75% similar contents according to a common framework.

4.3.1   Basic data on the programme supply

The programme supply changed considerably during the past decade. Based on data from Huisman & Jenniskens (1994), Huisman (1997) and present ministerial data, we conclude that there has been both a growth and decline. The growth pattern is based on the setting up of new programmes (particularly at universities), the decline pattern is based on a rearrangement of the supply (particularly at the short- and medium-cycle level) as a consequence of merger operations. We estimate – precise data are not available – that nowadays there are some 500 different programmes and 750 programmes in total offered by the Danish higher education institutions.

4.3.2   Setting up new programme and keeping control over the supply

If higher education institutions want to set up a new programme (either proposed by the central level of the institution or by study boards or faculties within the institution), it has to register with the Minister of Education or the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation. The proposals differ in terms of contents and size: sometimes information on the interest of students is taken up or information on the presumed labour market position of graduates. Sometimes a proposal consists 'only' of a few pages. In the case of an already existing programme (at other institutions), the

minister takes into account regional, economic and labour market considerations. Particularly in areas where labour market expectations are relatively predictable, these data guide the minister's decisions. In areas where these developments are difficult to forecast or in case a totally new programme is proposed, the government follows a rather careful approach. This approach in practice often implies that new programmes start in an experimental way with a restricted number of students. If the experiment turns out to be positive (acceptance of graduates on the labour market), the enrolments may be expanded. If the proposal is of sufficient quality and the "success" of the new programme is more or less evident, the government is less hesitant to grant its approval.

Regional, economic and labour market considerations also play a role regarding the total supply of programmes. The minister may decide to close down a programme: the new Higher Education Act states that "the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation may revoke the approval of an education[3] if it is no longer necessary that the university offers the education concerned, or if the education no longer lives up to the quality requirements". Quite often 'soft' mechanisms are used to achieve a result, i.e. the government and in general also the institutions themselves see it as their duty to maintain a 'healthy' overall supply. Warnings or suggestions by the minister are often taken seriously by the institutions.

The quality assurance mechanisms (involving the National Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation [*Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut,* EVA] and external examiners at the programme level) are mainly directed at improvement of the programmes. There is not so much of a danger that poor quality will lead to the demise of a programme. A recent example however is the closing down of a programme at all (nine) institutions offering the short-cycle programme.

The funding mechanism not directly rewards enrolments in higher education, for the government budget (regarding teaching) is based on the students' activities (i.e. credits earned by students passing their exams) and not on the sheer number of students enrolled.

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[3] "The approval of an education" in this context stands for the approval of a study programme.

The new legislation promises more leeway to the higher education institutions. It seems that the future control by government is mostly concerned with the formal aspects of new study programmes (such as admission, Bachelor-Master structure, degrees and titles). The new legislation will be implemented in July 2003, and it remains to be seen how the new rules will work in practice.

4.4   Institutions' responses and the present policy debate

The institutions in general thought that the regulations were rather time-consuming and bureaucratic. It took quite some time before a plan for a new programme was actually implemented. However, there are also positive comments: in cases where the start of a new programme was considered unproblematic, the government responded fairly speedy, in some cases also providing budgets for setting up or implementing the programme. In general, the institutions prefer the government not to interfere in the contents (including its quality) of the programme supply.

Transparency of the programme supply as such is not considered a problem by the institutions and the government. The higher education institutions put effort in providing (potential) students with adequate information on the study opportunities. In general there are good contacts with employers and their organisations, which – to some extent – are involved in improving study programmes and bringing about innovations in the supply.

5.   Australia

5.1   The government's rationale

The Australian higher education system consists of 37 public universities enrolling over 800,000 students, two quite small private universities and a number of other small specialist institutions. Australia has one of the highest participation rates in higher education of all OECD nations. In 2002, approximately 185,000 or 20% of the students studying at public universities were foreign nationals. Australia also has a comparatively large proportion of students enrolling distance education.

A remarkable feature of Australian higher education is that while legal/legislative responsibility for higher education rests with the individual states and territories, nearly all of the public financial support for higher education is provided by the federal government. Nonetheless, the federal government has shifted from a funder of higher education to a subsidiser. In 2002, only about 40% of the total higher education budget came from the federal government. The remainder was supplied through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (a student fee loan paid back through the tax system), other domestic student fees (mostly postgraduate), overseas student fees, endowments, consultancies, patents, and other mechanisms for raising private revenue. Private contributions to Australian public higher education are amongst the highest in the OECD.

Since the creation of the Unified National System of Higher Education in the early 1990s, the Australian government has mainly used market mechanisms to steer the system. Institutions compete directly for a proportion of their research funding, a practice that is becoming even more important under new funding regimes. Funding for education has largely been based on historical practices. However, under new reforms announced by the government in its May 2003 budget statement, funding arrangements may change substantially, involving both an even greater financial contribution from students and a type of contractual arrangement between individual universities and the federal government in determining public subsidies for educational activities. These new policies have the potential to give the federal government more control over what individual institutions teach – a power almost entirely absent at the present.

5.2   The main priorities of the government

One of the main priorities of the federal government has been to increase the size of the sector in terms of enrolments while simultaneously increasing efficiency and accountability. This has largely been achieved in the sense that student participation has increased dramatically over the last decade, while the cost per student unit (as determined by government subsidy) has fallen substantially. Government has also increased its emphasis on concentration and selectivity in research and research training, having established a national list of research priorities.

5.3   The regulation of the programme supply

There is no direct control of university programs at the national level. Government does not directly regulate the supply of university courses. There are 22 recognised fields of study, broad groupings ranging from agriculture and animal husbandry to arts, humanities and the social sciences to veterinary sciences. Some 35 universities offer 15 or more of these fields, while 19 institutions offer 20 or more. Within these fields of study, students have substantive freedom to design their own individual programs. In fact, there are some 100,000 units of study in the Australian system on which students can base their programs. The government can influence what programs institutions offer through financial incentives and disincentives. This will become even more direct if the measures announced in the May budget are adopted which designate particular program areas as national priorities – in this case, education and nursing – over a three year period.

State governments have the legislative power and responsibility for accrediting all higher education courses. State government offices of higher education exercise this power in relation to non-university higher education course providers, both public and private. With respect to universities, the states and territories have delegated this power to the individual institutions. Thus, universities are designated as self-accrediting institutions, and (with some minor limitations as discussed below) can establish or abandon any course programme they wish (see institutional procedures below). In practice, programmes are regulated by each institution's own course approval processes, which are influenced by such factors as market competition, student demand and in some cases, professional body accreditation.

Though universities remain self-accrediting institutions, in recent years there have been efforts to standardise course offerings across the nation. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was established in 1995 to provide a comprehensive, nationally consistent framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education. The AQF covers the final years of the school sector, the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector.

Due to the federated nature of the Australian political system and the fact that legally, all forms of education come under state jurisdiction, the AQF was developed under instruction from State, Territory and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

The AQF Guidelines provide nationally consistent criteria for defining qualifications based on learning outcomes, and promotes national and international recognition of qualifications offered in Australia. The AQF covers twelve broad categories of qualifications ranging from the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education to the Doctoral Degree. AQF provides broad definitions of each type of qualification and maintains a register of all programmes falling into the twelve categories.

The AQF Advisory Board, of itself, has no operational role in the approval of institutions or the accreditation of qualifications, these functions being the responsibility of the Commonwealth, States and Territories, which are members of MCEETYA. The purpose of this AQF Register is to provide a convenient, comprehensive public access point for the government-authorised accrediting bodies (including the self-accrediting institutions). In practice, individual courses are taken up in the Register when accredited by a state/territory government accrediting authority or approved by a self-accrediting institution (i.e. university). The AQF guidelines for the higher education qualifications reflect advice from the universities, as do the AQF qualification titles in general used by the universities.

Higher education qualifications other than those offered by the universities are accredited by the various State and Territory Higher Education Authorities, which also formally approve the providers. These State and Territory Authorities maintain registers of the private providers approved to issue accredited AQF qualifications.

Beside AQF, all courses for international students must be approved by the relevant State or Territory accreditation authority, and listed on The Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). CRICOS lists all providers registered to offer courses to people studying in Australia on student visas and the courses offered (website Cricos).

The federal government does have some indirect control over program supply through deciding on the overall number of higher education places it will fund at each institution. Through a process of educational profile negotiations, universities and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), agree upon a certain amount of educational activities that the Commonwealth will fund. But the university has autonomy over how the money will be internally allocated to programs. Educational activities for fee-paying students (both domestic and international) are not included in the negotiations.

The federal government also has some direct control over programme supply with respect to Higher Degree Research (HDR) students (research masters and PhD). HDR students are exempted from HECS fees, and the government has restricted the number of HDR places it will fund to about 26,000. It has also put in place a HDR student funding mechanism that penalises institutions if such students do not graduate in minimum time (effectively 3.5 years). The rationale for this policy is that there have been too many HDR students taking too long to graduate. Of course, universities can enrol as many HDR students who can study as long as they want so long as the students pay fees set by the institution.

5.4   Programme supply at the institutional level

As stated above, Australian Universities are 'self-accrediting'; that is, they are authorised to accredit their own courses and are responsible for their academic standards. They are expected to have appropriate quality assurance processes in place, including peer assessment processes, external examination of higher degrees and the involvement of professional bodies in the accreditation of particular courses.

The regulation of programme supply comes about mainly through market forces. Universities will mount new courses if they believe there is substantial student demand, and abandon existing programmes if they are not financially viable. With respect to the latter, an institution may choose to retain a non-financially viable course for social, cultural or other reasons. But with institutions

increasingly strapped for cash, this strategy is becoming a rarity. The trend in recent years in many universities has been to reduce the number of courses on offer for financial reasons.

Universities have a fairly elaborate course approval process, that flows from departments, to faculties, to an academic board, with final approval granted by council (board of governors). The process varies from institution to institution, but mostly a new course would be assessed in terms of its academic merit, market potential, and correspondence with the university's profile and strategic plan. All universities subject their courses to a review process (often involving an element of external review) on a regular basis – usually every three to five years (more on quality assurance issues below).

Medicine, due to both its cost and the power of the professional association, is somewhat an exception to the situation described above. Through direct government intervention, medical schools are restricted to a few universities.

5.5 Quality assurance

Universities in Australia are public or private autonomous bodies, which accredit their own courses. As indicated above, universities typically have in place a system of formal, cyclical reviews involving external assessors for the development/evaluation of programmes and organisational units.

There are a number of other dimensions to quality assurance processes involving universities that have an indirect impact on program supply, such as:

- the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and student evaluation surveys;
- the role of professional bodies and associations in accrediting professional courses such as health and medicine, law, accounting, engineering and architecture;
- the sector-wide indicators published annually in *The characteristics and performance of higher education institutions*;
- the use of external examiners for higher degrees by research and some honours degrees; and
- the encouragement of innovation and good teaching through the specific initiatives funded under the Commonwealth Government Higher Education Innovation Programme.

Universities are accountable to the community through their governing boards and, in relation to those receiving public funds from the Commonwealth, through information provided to the Commonwealth as part of the annual 'profiles' discussions. As indicated above, the profiles is the process by which the Commonwealth and universities agree broadly on the educational directions for the university over a three-year period. Universities also report to Government through their quality assurance and improvement plans which set out their goals, the strategies adopted and the indicators they use to assess their success in achieving these goals. These reports are published annually by the Commonwealth Government (website AQF).

In 2000, through MCEETYA, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established. AUQA is an independent body that audits teaching, learning, research and administration in Australian universities on a five yearly cycle. AUQA pays particular attention to programme approval and quality assurance mechanism in the institutions it audits. The audit reports are made public. However, AUQA has neither control over the programme supply nor any direct authority to penalise institutions for inferior course quality. (website AUQA).

DEST publishes a range of comparative data to inform students, institutions and the public generally about the characteristics and performance of universities, such as annual university quality assurance and improvement plans. DEST provides awards for innovative teaching practice and funds projects, which promote quality and excellence in teaching and learning.

5.6   Policy implications

The policy rationale for no direct government regulation of university program supply has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of academic and institutional autonomy. Government and the institutions consider that the right to teach and the right to choose what to teach are part and parcel of academic autonomy. However, the rationale is questioned from time to time. As indicated above, foreshowed policy changes may give the federal government through the Department of Education, Science and Training more direct control (through funding) of what is offered at individual institutions. The minister of Education has from time to time questioned the soundness of courses offered by some universities, such as tourism. But to date, the government has had no mechanism to

directly control what programmes universities offer. The government's only substantial mechanism for controlling programme supply is the power of the purse, and somewhat ironically as institutions receive more and more of their income from sources other than the public purse, that power may decline in importance.

While market regulation of programme supply has been the norm, government does attempt to help regulate supply by other means from time to time. For example, many institutions have shed financially unviable courses in such areas as the classics and ancient languages. The fear is if all institutions get rid of such programmes, they will then be lost to the national higher education grid. Government has assisted institutions to seek ways in which to cooperate with joint programme offerings in areas of low demand but high cultural significance. But such efforts are really quite minor.

6.   Finland

6.1   Introduction

The Finnish higher education system comprises two parallel sectors: universities and
ammattikorkeakoulo (AMKs). The AMKs were established during the reform process of the 1990s,
and now a network of 29 AMKs covers the entire country. AMK degrees are Bachelor-level higher
education degrees with a professional emphasis. There are 20 universities in Finland, ten of which
are multi-faculty institutions and ten specialist institutions. Of the specialist institutions, three are
universities of technology, three are schools of economics and business administration, and the
remaining four are art academies. In addition, university-level education is provided at one military
academy under the Ministry of Defence. All universities engage in both education and research and
have the right to award doctorates.

6.2   The main priorities of the government

Educational policies are based on the idea that Finland is to be developed into a humane
knowledge-based society through education and research. The government is committed to maintain
the high level of public funding to the education and research system. The universities are run by
the state, while AMKs are either locally or privately run. In the mid-1980s the Finnish higher
education system was still one of the most centrally controlled and regulated systems in Europe.
The reform with respect to steering and governance of higher education started in the late 1980s.
The introduction of self-regulatory structures and the strengthening of the institutional autonomy
have characterised the developments since then (Hölttä and Malkki, 2000). In an effort to improve
higher education performance, considerable changes have been effected in higher education steering
and management systems. In recent years, regulations have been lifted and authority transferred
from the Ministry of Education to the higher education institutions. At the same time, budgetary and
regulatory control has given way to steering of performance, backed up by a shift to 'budgeting by
result' and the development of evaluation systems. A key element in Ministry/higher education
institution relations is the consultation procedure by which the Ministry and the institutions jointly
set the objectives for each institution and agree on funding levels or number of new students in case
of the AMKs.

Up until the mid-1980s, the internal organisation and decision-making of the universities was regulated by administrative orders and decrees. The state university budget determined the allocation of funds in detail. Decrees on studies and degrees included detailed stipulations on the curricula and the provision of instruction. Teachers' duties were laid down in detail in collective agreements. Today, the changed steering system allows universities extensive freedom of action. The role of the Ministry of Education is restricted to strategic plans and target-setting and monitoring the overall performance of the universities. Up till the 1998 *Universities Act*, there were separate acts and decrees for each university stipulating the mission of the university, the system of administration, teaching and other operational units, languages of instruction, teaching and research and so on. The new act makes up a loose legislative framework leaving much room for each university.

6.3   The regulation of the programme supply in the recent past

The Ministry of Education always had the supreme power when new programmes were to be established or the existing distribution of study fields across universities needed to be changed. The Ministry allocated the annual university budget, although the universities have great autonomy to decide how to use the money. In the case of programme regulation, the supervision of the Ministry still exists in spite of the current deregulation process and the adoption of the subsidiarity principle. Legislation on higher education degrees comprises the *Decree on the System of Higher Education Degrees* (464/1998) and twenty separate decrees for each of the twenty fields of education: theology; humanities, law; social sciences; economics and business administration; psychology; educational sciences; natural sciences; agriculture and forestry; sport sciences; engineering and architecture; medicine; dentistry; health sciences; veterinary medicine; pharmacy; music; art and design; theatre; dance; and fine arts. These decrees stipulate the objectives and scope of university degrees, their general structure and content, as well as the distribution of educational responsibilities between different universities. The 1998 *Universities Act* ensures the autonomy of the universities and prescribes their functions, operation and objectives in general terms only. Within these limits, each university decides on the detailed organization of its administration and the decision-making power of its administrative bodies.

Legislation concerning AMKs – the *Polytechnics Act* (255/1995) and *Decree* (256/1995) – came into force in March 1995. The *Decree on the System of Higher Education Degrees* also covers AMK degrees. AMKs design their degree programmes and curricula autonomously. The degree programmes and field-specific student intake are agreed upon between the Ministry and the AMKs in consultations concerning targets and performance. The studies leading to a AMK degree at the Bachelor level are organized into degree programmes designed and arranged by the individual AMKs, targeted at a particular job area in working life calling for professional expertise and its development. Each AMK submits a proposal for its degree programmes to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry decision states the name of the programme, its extent in credits, the compulsory practical training component in credits, the name of the degree, and the title that the graduate is authorised to use. The AMK itself decides on the curriculum for each programme and how the courses will be arranged.

6.3.1   Some data on the programme supply

The target number of degrees, i.e. Master's degrees and doctorates by field of study, are agreed in performance negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the universities. These target figures are based on national analyses of educational needs and on development plans for education. The universities decide their annual student intake for each field on the basis of these targets. According to the Development Plan For Education and Research for 1999–2004, the aim is to offer a study place to 25,000 AMK students and to 19,000 university students in Master's programmes in 2004 and to increase student intake in adult education (Ministry of Education, 2000).

At the start of the AMK reform it was considered extremely important for the experimental institutions to develop their course structures and content vigorously. They were also encouraged to combine skills in a variety of sectors to form new kinds of multidisciplinary programmes, and AMKs have succeeded very well in this respect. However, one consequence was that the range of variously titled degree programmes provided by the different AMKs was at risk of becoming too great, with new programmes being added every year. AMKs organise education in the following seven fields of study: natural resources; technology and communications; business and administration; tourism, catering and institutional management; social services and health care; culture sector; humanities and education. Though the degree programme structure of individual

AMKs was clear enough, it was no longer clear within the system as a whole. The system was felt to be excessively complex from the point of view of the study and careers guidance given prior to entrance to AMKs and from the point of view of working life. Both the Ministry of Education and the AMKs also felt that detailed regulation by the Ministry was unnecessary, particularly in the case of specialization options. Therefore, in 1998, at the request of the Ministry of Education, the Rectors' Council of Finnish Polytechnics set up a degree programme project to rethink the overall structure. The aim was to find a structure that would effectively reflect the areas of expertise needed in working life, while allowing individual AMKs greater freedom to profile and develop their own educational provision for those areas. The project was arranged into sectoral groups involving all the AMKs that offered the education in question. As a result of the work done within the project, the Ministry has now approved for each AMK a degree programme structure that is valid indefinitely from 2001 onwards. This process resulted in the following division of (different) degree programmes.

Table 6.1: Division of different degree programmes at AMKs

Sector of education	1992	1999	2000	2001
Natural resources	5	13	18	14
Technology and communications	30	70	117	47
Business and administration	5	21	51	11
Tourism, catering and institutional management	5	12	19	12
Health care and social services	3	10	42	34
Culture	4	18	25	17
Humanities and education	-	-	10	6
No specific sector of study	-	5	-	-
TOTAL	52	149	292	149

Source: Ministry of Education (2002)

6.3.2 *Setting up new programmes and the control over the (existing) supply*

Although the universities were given freedom to decide on issues such as the content of their programmes without the approval of the Ministry of Education, the establishment of new programmes must still be granted ministerial approval (Gornitzka and Maassen, 2000). The Ministry of Education drafts a performance agreement (or contract) with each individual institution, based on an initial proposal of the university. In this contract it is agreed, how many degrees the institution intends to grant in the contract period of three years. Quantitative targets are set for

higher academic (Master's) and postgraduate degrees as well as adult education. The new, more flexible decrees on degrees give universities more freedom to plan their degree programmes. The National Board of Education produces information on the anticipation of quantitative educational needs on a regular basis. The anticipation stems from forecasts based on long-term developments and different scenarios in working life in the future (which are used to calculate the need for new labour), as well as extensive

statistical data. The main partners in this work are the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education and Statistics Finland. Quantitative data on educational needs is produced on initial vocational education, AMK education and university education.

The Ministry – university contract will be concluded for three-year periods which means that the target outcomes and the basic grounds for allocating resources are determined for this period (Hölttä and Rekilä, 2003). The universities send their proposal for the contract in February to the Ministry. The Ministry comments the proposals and the universities have a possibility to provide the Ministry with additional information if needed. The universities submit an account on the achievement of goals in the form of an annual report. The core of this process is the annual updating of the KOTA database[4]. The negotiations will run in April. Most of the issues have already been agreed in the dialogue before formal negotiation. Every three years, there is a profound negotiation round for the coming planning and contracting period, and also the degree goals are on the table. The agreements will be signed after approval of the state budget by the Parliament. From the year 2002 onwards the Ministry will provide formal written feed back to the universities on their performance. The goals determined in the contract include the general goals for the whole higher education system and specific goals for the individual institution in question.

6.4   Institutions' responses to national strategies

Higher education institutions are free to decide on their internal organisation and decision-making structures. One significant limitation for institutional autonomy is that the fields of education represented at each university are still determined by the decrees. The responses of the higher education institutions have been in line with the national strategy on the development of an information society and the development of electronics and telecommunication (Hölttä and Malkki, 2000). For example, study places supporting industrial development were increased rapidly in

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[4] Statistical database maintained by the Finnish Ministry of Education. It contains data describing university performance by institutions and by fields of study from 1981 onwards.

response to the demand for a qualified labour force by establishing new programmes, expanding the existing ones, and by retraining the degree holders in other field to the experts of electronics. Empirical research shows that the steering reform has been quite successful, as assessed by the academic and administrative institutional leaders (Hölltä and Rekilä, 2003). Also the productivity of the higher education system has improved. It is, however, clear that the steering system emphasises strongly the quantitative aspects and monetary carrots as the means of steering.

6.5   Policy debate

As early as 1997 the question of the necessity for postgraduate degrees in AMKs arose and the decision on the post-graduate degrees was taken two years later, at the beginning of 2000. The law on the AMK postgraduate degrees came into force 1 January 2002 and the Ministry of Education granted permission to twenty AMKs to begin experimental postgraduate degree programmes. More AMKs are being included in 2003. The experiment will end in 2005. The AMK postgraduate degree is a new university degree and aimed at people who have completed a AMK degree or other applicable higher education degree, and have a minimum of three years of work experience in the field after the completion of the degree. The new higher education degree is determined on the basis of working life needs and is implemented in line with adult education goals.

The Finnish education authorities contend that there is no need to adopt external accreditation of institutions of higher education and degree programmes (Ministry of Education, 2001). Their argument is based on the fact that decisions regarding new sectors in education or new degree programmes are made by the Ministry of Education after an assessment of whether the institution has the human resources and the financial wherewithal to handle the new functions. Accreditation of professional studies is an exception; here a board operating under the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council carries out the process. This system was developed to improve the legal safeguards of customers of (expensive) further education programmes and to set minimum standards for approval (Ministry of Education, 2001).

7.   Summary and conclusions

7.1   Introduction

Below we summarise the main findings per higher education system. In the subsequent section we formulate the conclusions.

Summary of the findings

7.2.1   Scotland

The Scottish government mainly uses market mechanisms to direct higher education. Priorities in higher education policy are widening access and maintaining and improving quality. With regard to the programme supply, the market approach implies that higher education institutions themselves are responsible for what they offer: the choices regarding the supply are considered to be part of academic freedom. Institutions make their choices based on analyses of their portfolio and developments on the student and labour markets. They are expected to respect the needs and wishes of the labour market (particularly through the validation by professional organizations). Although the government keeps its distance, there is some indirect involvement in the programme supply. The (British) government has taken the responsibility to develop a classification of programmes. In addition, the national quality assurance system keeps an eye on the quality of the programmes: in the case of prolonged poor quality, the government may withdraw funding. Finally, the Scottish government indirectly steers the programme supply – through the funding council (SHEFC) – by determining the number of student places per institution. Through specific instruments (earmarked student places and the *Widening Access Premium* programme), the government stimulates institutions to organise their supply in such a way that it meets the national priorities (participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, co-operation with business and industry). The institutions seem to value the government approach, partly because of the status incentives regarding the extra student places. At this moment, there is no policy debate on the efficiency and/or transparency of the supply.

7.2.2   Flanders

The general steering philosophy of the Flemish government can be characterised in terms of stepping back and decentralisation. Regarding amongst others quality assurance and the programme supply, the Ministry of the Flemish Community still is involved. The Ministry aims at flexibilisation of the programmes and maintenance of the efficiency (optimalisation and transparency) of the supply. As a consequence of the implementation of the new higher education

decree, the government has developed new instruments to regulate the efficiency of the supply. New study programmes need the approval (positive judgement) of both the Accreditation Organisation and the Recognition Committee. The former particularly judges the proposal using quality criteria, the latter judges the macro-efficiency of the proposal. The criteria of the Recognition Committee are rather similar to those applied in the recent past by the Dutch ACO. The new decree does not comprise instruments to improve the transparency of the supply; the government expects that the higher education institutions will adjust and reorganise the supply in such a way that the needs of the knowledge society will be satisfied. The higher education institutions seem to have accepted the new regulations. At this moment there is no political debate on macro-efficiency.

7.2.3   Denmark

The Danish government (also) has the intention to increase the autonomy of higher education institutions. Regarding the programme supply, the government argues for curricular reform, with explicit attention to competence-based education, the strengthening of the relationships between higher education and the labour market and flexibilisation of education. In judging proposals for new programmes, the government takes into account the situation of graduates on the labour market and the regional dispersion of the (existing) supply. The Danish government seems to apply the criteria in a flexible way: if the need for the start of a new programme seems evident, the government does not stand in the way. In the case the quality of a certain programme is insufficient (to be judged by the national quality assurance agency EVA), the government may close down the programme. This has hardly happened in the recent past, most of the times a too low quality is improved on the short term. The higher education institutions seem to have accepted the existing arrangements, that – as of July 2003 – grant even more autonomy to the institutions. At the moment there is no policy debate on transparency and/or efficiency of the programme supply.

7.2.4   Australia

The Australian government stresses the need for a growth in participation in higher education, whereas at the same time efficiency and accountability mechanism should be improved. The regulation of the programme supply is left to the higher education institutions themselves. Universities compose their offer based on the expectations of the students and/or the labour market.

Exceptions are programmes that need relatively high public investments, such as medicine. In such cases, government approval is necessary. Institutions are expected to maintain the quality of the programme supply, internal procedures are assumed to guarantee that quality. The government only determines the classification scheme for programmes (recognised fields of study). In addition, the qualification framework of the AQF plays a role: a government-initiated attempt to increase the transparency of the different types of qualifications in post-compulsory education. The government indirectly steers the programme supply by deciding upon the funded student places at each institution. This decision is based on negotiations between the government and the respective universities. The institutions are free to allocate the government budget within the organisation. The institutions are satisfied with the arrangement regarding the programme supply, although there are some complaints about the decreasing budgets for education. At this moment, there is no policy debate on the transparency and/or efficiency of the supply.

7.2.5 Finland

Like in many other Western European higher education systems, the Finnish government is steering the system at (a larger) distance. A specific way the government operationalises its steering approach, is through three-year contracts/covenants with the higher education institutions. In those contracts commitments are detailed regarding the objectives for the three-year period (including targets regarding the number of graduates). This way of steering also has implications for the programme supply. Institutions negotiate on an individual basis with the government about the student intake per field of education (twenty fields for the university, seven fields for the AMKs). The institutions determine the contents of the programmes, the government decides on the more technical elements (number of credit points, degrees, etc.). Evaluations of the new steering approach indicate that – in general – this arrangement is successful in the eyes of the academics and administrators of higher education institutions. After the debate on the changes in the regulation and clarification of the programme structures in the AMK sector, there are at present no political debates on the transparency and/or efficiency of the programme supply.

7.3   Conclusions

The comparison of the policy arrangement regarding the programme supply in Scotland, Flanders, Denmark, Australia and Finland leads to the following conclusions:

1) In general we can distinguish three types of arrangements by the amount of governmental interference in the programme supply. Flanders (like the Netherlands) falls into the category of strong government involvement with the efficiency and transparency of the supply. Denmark and Finland belong to the category of systems where there is restricted interference in the programme supply. Scotland and Australia are examples of countries where the government hardly interferes (only indirectly) in the programme supply: higher education institutions are responsible for the supply of their programmes.

2) Macro-efficiency and transparency of the supply are only explicit elements of the political debate in Flanders. In the other higher education systems these terms are not part of the policy jargon.

3) Common elements in the regulation of the supply are the classification of the supply and the organisation/ordinance of quality assurance mechanisms.

3a) In all systems the supply is categorised into registers or schemes. The government designs these
    classifications (or requires agencies to develop these) and asks the higher education institutions to indicate in which categories their programmes fit.

3b) In all systems quality assurance mechanisms play a role in the programme supply. Such mechanisms are in place to see to it that poor quality may have consequences for the supply. Consequences vary from informal pressure to improve quality to withdrawal of funding.

4) In general there are – at this moment – no policy debates on the regulation of the programme supply. It must be mentioned however, that in a number of systems recent reforms have been implemented (amongst others in the context of the Bologna Declaration). Impacts of these reforms – including those affecting the regulation of the supply – are not yet visible.

Summary and conclusions

5) In a number of systems, the governments use instruments that indirectly impact the behaviour of higher education institutions regarding the development of their supply. The instruments are mainly financial of nature. In Scotland and Australia, the funding of a maximum of student places is an important incentive for the institutions to organise their supply in an effective and efficient way. In Denmark the funding of active students (students earning credits) is an important incentive to pay attention to the quality of education and student support. In Finland, the government indirectly steers through contracting. The contracts, amongst others, contain commitments regarding the student intake and the expected number of graduates.

8. Nederlandse samenvatting en conclusies

8.1 Inleiding

In het Nederlandse hogeronderwijsbeleid wordt in voorbereiding op het Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek Plan 2004 onder andere de regulering van het opleidingenaanbod aan de orde gesteld. Ter ondersteuning van de discussie heeft het Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen het Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), Universiteit Twente gevraagd om te rapporteren over de regulering van het opleidingenaanbod in een aantal relevante hoger onderwijs stelsels.

De centrale vraagstelling luidde: Op welke wijze is in een aantal relevante hoger onderwijs stelsel de regulering van het opleidingenaanbod vorm gegeven? Deze vraagstelling is in de volgende vijf subvragen uiteengelegd:

- Wat is de rationale van de overheid met betrekking tot de regulering van het opleidingenaanbod?
- Welke instrumenten worden ingezet om het aanbod te reguleren?
- Welke instrumenten worden ingezet om de start van nieuwe opleidingen te reguleren?
- Op welke wijze maken de hoger onderwijsinstellingen – in het algemeen – gebruik van de regelgeving?
- Vindt er op dit moment discussie plaats over de regulering en zo ja, welke problemen/oplossingen worden gesignaleerd?

Deze vragen zijn beantwoord voor de volgende hoger onderwijs stelsels: Schotland, Vlaanderen, Denemarken, Australië en Finland. De beschrijving en analyse is gebaseerd op documenten van de overheid en/of nationale hoger onderwijsorganisaties en interviews met relevante personen in de betreffende stelsels.

8.2 Samenvatting van de bevindingen

8.2.1 Schotland

De Schotse overheid stuurt het hoger onderwijs voornamelijk via de markt. Prioriteiten in het hogeronderwijsbeleid zijn het vergroten van de deelname en kwaliteitsbehoud en –verbetering. Met betrekking tot het opleidingenaanbod betekent dit dat de instellingen zelf verantwoordelijk zijn voor hun aanbod: de keuze van een instelling met betrekking tot het aanbod wordt geacht te behoren tot

de academische autonomie. De instellingen maken dergelijke keuzes gebaseerd op analyses van hun portfolio en ontwikkelingen in de studenten en –arbeidsmarkt. Er wordt verwacht dat zij de wensen van het afnemend veld (vooral door validatie van professionele organisaties) in acht nemen. Hoewel de overheid dus vooral op afstand stuurt, is er toch zijdelingse en indirecte bemoeienis met het aanbod. De (Britse) overheid heeft de verantwoordelijkheid op zich genomen om een classificatie van opleidingen te ontwikkelen. Daarnaast wordt door middel van het nationale kwaliteitszorgsysteem controle uitgeoefend over de kwaliteit van het aanbod: bij langdurige kwaliteitsproblemen kan de overheid de bekostiging stopzetten. Tenslotte stuurt de Schotse overheid op indirecte wijze – via de *funding council* (SHEFC) – door jaarlijks het aantal te bekostigen studentplaatsen voor elke instelling vast te stellen.Door middel van zeer specifieke instrumenten (bijv. extra geoormerkte studentenplaatsen en het *Wider Access Premium* programma) stimuleert de overheid instellingen om het aanbod zo in te richten dat aan nationale doelstellingen (deelname uit lagere sociaal-economische klassen, samenwerking met bedrijfsleven) tegemoet wordt gekomen. De instellingen lijken het arrangement met betrekking tot het opleidingenaanbod te waarderen, onder andere ook vanwege de (statusverhogende) prikkels die het arrangement bevat voor extra studentenplaatsen. Er vindt op dit moment geen beleidsdiscussie plaats over de doelmatigheid en/of transparantie van het aanbod.

8.2.2 Vlaanderen

De algemene sturingsfilosofie van de Vlaamse overheid kan getypeerd worden in termen van terugtreden en decentraliseren. Met betrekking tot onder andere de kwaliteitszorg en het opleidingenaanbod, ziet het Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap aanleiding om nauw(er) betrokken te zijn. Ze ziet het als haar taak zowel de flexibilisering van de programma's te stimuleren als zorg te dragen voor de doelmatigheid (optimalisatie en transparantie) van het opleidingenaanbod. Met de recente goedkeuring van het structuurdecreet aangaande de invoering van de Bachelor-Master structuur heeft de overheid een nieuw instrumentarium ter regulering van de doelmatigheid ontwikkeld. Nieuwe opleidingen behoeven de goedkeuring (positieve beoordeling) van zowel het Accreditatieorgaan als van de Erkenningscommissie. Waar de eerste vooral kwaliteitscriteria zal hanteren, wordt de tweede geacht een voorstel voor een nieuwe opleiding op macrodoelmatigheid te toetsen. De criteria voor doelmatigheid komen sterk overeen met criteria die in het nabije verleden in Nederland zijn toegepast door de Adviescommissie

Onderwijsaanbod, bijvoorbeeld de relatie van het (nieuwe) programma tot het bestaande aanbod en de maatschappelijke relevantie van het programma. Het structuurdecreet bevat geen instrumenten ter verbetering van de transparantie van het aanbod; de overheid verwacht dat de instellingen in de nabije toekomst het aanbod zo (re)organiseren dat aan de behoefte van de kennissamenleving wordt tegemoetgekomen. De instellingen lijken accoord te zijn met het nieuwe arrangement en er is op dit moment geen discussie.

8.2.3 Denemarken

De Deense overheid heeft (ook) de intentie om hoger onderwijsinstellingen meer autonomie te verlenen. Met betrekking tot het opleidingenaanbod wordt recentelijk aandacht gevraagd voor curriculumhervorming, met onder andere expliciete aandacht voor competentiegericht onderwijs, het versterken van de relaties tussen hoger onderwijs en arbeidsmarkt en flexibilisering van het onderwijs. De overheid houdt bij het beoordelen van plannen voor nieuwe opleidingen rekening met de situatie op de arbeidsmarkt en de regionale spreiding van voorzieningen. De Deense overheid lijkt de criteria flexibel toe te passen: als de start van een opleiding evident lijkt, staat weinig in de weg om dat mogelijk te maken. In het geval de kwaliteit van programma's onvoldoende is (ter beoordeling aan het nationale kwaliteitszorginstituut EVA), heeft de overheid de mogelijkheid om een programma te sluiten. Dit is echter nog nauwelijks voorgekomen, meestal wordt een te laag geachte kwaliteit op relatief korte termijn in voldoende mate verbeterd. De instellingen lijken te kunnen leven met het bestaande arrangement, dat met ingang van juli 2003 nog meer autonomie verleent aan de instellingen. Er vindt op dit moment geen beleidsdiscussie plaats over transparantie en/of doelmatigheid van het opleidingenaanbod.

8.2.4 Australië

De Australische overheid benadrukt de behoefte aan groei in het hoger onderwijs, terwijl tegelijkertijd de efficiëntie en verantwoordingsrelaties verbeterd moeten worden. De regulering van het opleidingenaanbod wordt overgelaten aan de instellingen zelf. Universiteiten stellen hun aanbod vast op basis van de verwachtingen van studenten en/of het afnemend veld. Uitzonderingen betreffen opleidingen waarvoor relatief grote investeringen nodig zijn, zoals geneeskunde. De instellingen worden geacht de kwaliteit te handhaven van het aanbod, interne procedures moeten zorg dragen voor de kwaliteitsborging. De overheid stelt slechts een classificatieschema voor

opleidingen (*recognised fields of study*) vast. Daarnaast speelt het kwalificatieraamwerk (AQF) een rol: een door de overheid geïnitieerde poging om helderheid te verschaffen in de verschillende typen kwalificaties in het niet-verplichte onderwijs. De overheid stuurt indirect het aanbod door de (te bekostigen) aantallen studenten vast te stellen per instelling. Dit gebeurt door een onderhandelingsproces tussen instelling en overheid, het staat de instellingen vrij de overheidsmiddelen naar eigen inzicht in te zetten. De instellingen zijn tevreden over het arrangement, hoewel er wel klachten zijn over de geringe budgetten voor onderwijs. Op dit moment vindt er – na het debat in het midden van de jaren negentig over de kwalificaties – geen discussie plaats over de doelmatigheid en/of transparantie van het aanbod.

8.2.5   Finland

Evenals overheden in andere Westeuropese hogeronderwijsstelsels, stuurt de Finse overheid het hoger onderwijs (meer) op afstand. Dit sturen op afstand krijgt in het Finse stelsel een specifieke vorm door driejaarlijkse contracten tussen instellingen en het ministerie. In die contracten worden afspraken vastgelegd over de te bereiken doelstellingen (inclusief *targets* met betrekking tot het aantal te realiseren diploma's). De sturing door middel van contracten impliceert ook het maken van afspraken over het programma-aanbod. Instellingen onderhandelen op individuele basis met het ministerie over de studenteninstroom per *field of education* (twintig voor de universiteiten, zeven voor de AMK's), over nieuwe programma's en het bestaande aanbod. De nationale regelgeving bepaalt welke *fields of education* worden aangeboden per instelling. De instelling bepaalt zelf de inhoud van de programma's, de overheid stelt vast (hoeveelheid *credit ponts*, titulatuur, e.d.). Evaluaties van de sturing door middel van contracten geven aan dat – in het algemeen – deze vorm van regulering succesvol is in de ogen van academici en bestuurders van instellingen. Na de discussie over een wijziging in de regulering van het aanbod voor de AMK's, leidend tot versoepeling van de regelgeving en heldere afspraken over de programmastructuur, vinden er op dit moment geen discussies plaats over de doelmatigheid en/of transparantie van het opleidingenaanbod.

8.3   Conclusies

De vergelijking van de beleidsarrangementen in Schotland, Vlaanderen, Denemarken, Australië en Finland met de bestaande situatie in Nederland levert de volgende conclusies op:

1)   Er zijn in het algemeen drie typen arrangementen te onderscheiden naar de mate van overheidsbemoeienis met het opleidingenaanbod. Vlaanderen valt (net als Nederland) in de categorie van sterke bemoeienis met de doelmatigheid en transparantie van het aanbod. Denemarken en Finland passen in de categorie van beperkte bemoeienis met de regulering van het aanbod. Schotland en Australië horen in de categorie van (zeer) geringe bemoeienis met de regulering van het aanbod: het organiseren van het aanbod is de verantwoordelijkheid van de individuele instelling.

2)   Macrodoelmatigheid en transparantie van het aanbod is alleen een expliciet punt van beleid en discussie in Vlaanderen. In de andere stelsels behoren deze termen niet tot het beleidsvocabulaire.

3)   Gemeenschappelijke elementen in de overheidsregulering zijn het classificeren van het aanbod en het instellen/verordenen van kwaliteitszorgsystemen.

3a)   In alle stelsels wordt het opleidingenaanbod geclassificeerd in registers of classificatieschema's. De overheid ontwerpt deze registers/classificatieschema's (of   laat deze ontwerpen) en vraagt de instellingen aan te geven waar de afzonderlijke opleidingen gepositioneerd moeten worden.

3b)   In alle stelsels spelen kwaliteitszorgsystemen een zekere rol in het opleidingenaanbod. Dergelijke systemen zorgen ervoor dat een te lage kwaliteit consequenties kan hebben voor het aanbod. Die consequenties variëren van informele druk op de instelling tot het stopzetten van de bekostiging.

4)   In het algemeen worden er momenteel geen discussies gevoerd over de regulering van het opleidingenaanbod, waarbij moet worden opgemerkt dat recent in een aantal stelsels hervormingen zijn doorgevoerd in de structuur van het aanbod (o.a. in reactie op de Bologna Verklaring). Effecten van die hervormingen – inclusief repercussies voor de regulering van het aanbod – zijn nog niet zichtbaar.

5) In een aantal landen worden door de overheid instrumenten ingezet, die indirect consequenties hebben voor het gedrag van de instellingen met betrekking tot het opleidingenaanbod. Deze instrumenten zijn voornamelijk financieel van karakter. In Schotland en Australië vormt de bekostiging van een maximum aantal studentplaatsen per instelling een belangrijke prikkel voor de instellingen om op efficiënte en effectieve wijze het aanbod te organiseren. In Denemarken vormt de bekostiging van actieve studenten een belangrijke prikkel om vooral aandacht te besteden aan de kwaliteit van het onderwijs en de onderwijsbegeleiding. In Finland wordt indirect gestuurd door contracten die, onder andere, afspraken over de in- en uitstroom vastleggen.

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