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Issues in higher education policy 2005

An update on higher education policy issues in 2005 in 10 Western countries

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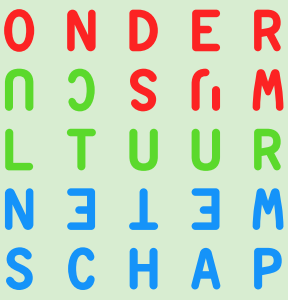

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1 Introduction

Higher education systems increasingly are open to influences from outside the system. Describing higher education systems in a highly dynamic context therefore requires a regular updating of the information presented. The annual CHEPS International Higher Education Monitor[1] (IHEM) update report provides insights into the latest developments in the higher education infrastructure, higher education finance, governance and quality assurance in the countries that the IHEM covers. In the first and main part of the report, the issues most pertinent in public debates and policies are identified and discussed. Information is collected from written and electronic sources as well as through consultation of national experts. The second part of the report is a comparative analysis. In this part, the issues are identified that are common in a number of national systems or even in most systems. Although no additional country information is presented in this section, the comparative analysis also builds on insights obtained from relevant CHEPS research projects. The cross-national presentation of issues in some cases thus can cast a different light on the national issues.

[1] The CHEPS 'International Higher Education Monitor' (IHEM) is an ongoing research project aimed at the monitoring of higher education systems and higher education policies in ten (Western) European countries and Australia. A major part of the project is commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. IHEM consists of in-depth country reports, (describing national systems and policies), thematic reports (providing in-depth comparative analyses of major issues in higher education research), trend reports (identifying changes in quantitative aspects) and a database with quantitative and qualitative information on the higher education systems. For further information see http://www.utwente.nl/cheps/higher_education_monitor/

2 Australia

Following on from the 2002 Review of Higher Education, the Australian Government announced a package of new higher education policies, to be implemented between 2004 and 2008. The year 2005 represented the first year in which the majority of the higher education reforms were introduced.

2.1 Educational Infrastructure

2.1.1 Medical Education in Australia

Medical education stakeholders across Australia engaged in debate about medical training in universities. In response to this debate, the Minister for Education, Science and Training commissioned a study into undergraduate level medical education. This study started in 2005 and addressed graduate learning outcomes, including expected skills and knowledge, and the transition to internship and postgraduate specialist training.

2.2 Finance

2.2.1 Student support

In June 2005, a special committee installed by the Australian Senate presented the results of a review of the existing student support system. The *Australian Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, and Education References Committee* released its report, 'Student Income Support,' in June 2005[2]. There were massive complaints regarding current student income support, especially from student organisations. The Report contains 15 recommendations, most of which focus on keeping the system responsive to its stakeholders, by organising regular meetings and surveys among those stakeholders. The Department should, according to the Committee, be aware of the problems and the wishes of the primary stakeholders, and it should be more aware of the costs of the system. The recommendations are stated as proposed investigations into the consequences of possible changes in the existing procedures. The Senate did not unanimously agree with all the recommendations.

2.2.2 Fees

Another controversial issue discussed in 2005 was that of Voluntary Student Unionism. The Australian Government stated it was opposed to compulsory union membership because it was believed to hinder freedom of association. The government believes students should have the right to decide for themselves whether they wish to join a union or be a member of an

[2] www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eet_ctte/studentincome04/report/index.htm

organisation. Students should not be required to pay a fee that supports a political organisation or political activities in order to further their education. In 2005, the Australian Government introduced a legislative Bill to implement voluntary student unionism. The Bill proposes to ensure that providers do not require students to be or become members of a student organisation. It will also ensure that students are not required by a provider to pay any fees to a provider or any other entity for the provision of an amenity, facility or service that is not of an academic nature, unless the person has chosen to contribute to the amenity, facility or service. The Australian Government claimed it is not opposed to student organisations and students and should be free to organise, develop representative structures and undertake advocacy on behalf of other students. It argues that legislation for voluntary student unionism will not stop or impede such voluntary activity.

2.3 Research infrastructure

2.3.1 Research Quality Framework

In May 2004 the Prime Minister announced that the Australian Government would establish Quality and Accessibility Frameworks for publicly funded research as part of the Backing Australia's Ability programme (see also the previous IHEM Policy issue report). The aim of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) initiative is to develop the basis for an improved assessment of the quality and impact of publicly funded research and an effective process to achieve this. The RQF should:

- Be transparent to government and taxpayers so that they are better informed about the results of the public investment in research
- Ensure that all publicly funded research agencies and research providers are encouraged to focus on the quality and relevance of their research
- Avoid a high cost of implementation and imposing a high administration burden on research providers

In 2004, the Government established an Expert Advisory Group (EAG), chaired by Professor Sir Gareth Roberts (from the United Kingdom) to support the development of the Research Quality Framework. The EAG for the development of the RQF finalised its advice on the preferred RQF model in December 2005. The Final Advice has been forwarded to the Minister for his consideration.

The proposal states that both the quality and the impact of the research are to be expressed in ratings which in turn will be translated into funding decisions. The government's research support programme, as well as the research training programme funding, must be based on evidence of a university's research training quality as well as the quality and impact of its research.

There was substantial commentary in the submissions regarding research impact, particularly a need to define what is meant by research impact and to clearly delineate research impact for the RQF from 'Third Stream' activities at universities. There are three main issues regarding

evidence to be provided for assessment from the submissions: (1) the more disciplinary focused question of what will constitute a research output, (2) the question of what is meant by the context statement (its contents and its role in assessment, i.e. weighting in consideration of a rating), and (3) what will be assessed (by the panel, international assessors, validation assessors) between the actual research outputs and the evidence portfolio.

2.3.2 Upgrading the Research Infrastructure

The *Systemic Infrastructure Initiative* provides funding to upgrade the systemic infrastructure of universities to meet demonstrated needs. Funding is provided for innovative approaches that link or expand access to shared facilities, such as libraries, information and communications technologies, specialised equipment, technical and administrative assistance. The Systemic Infrastructure Initiative was announced by the Government in January 2001 as part of its five year programme Backing Australia's Ability. The programme is intended 'to upgrade the basic infrastructure of universities ...' and to support research and research training. University infrastructure comprises the 'overhead' resources essential for undertaking high quality research and research training projects or programs. It includes: the operation of facilities such as libraries, computing centres, animal houses, herbaria, and experimental farms; the purchase, hire, installation and maintenance of equipment; telecommunications; and salaries and services for support staff. The Systemic Infrastructure Initiative will provide funding to upgrade the infrastructure of universities. Funding will be provided for innovative approaches that link or expand access to shared facilities, such as libraries, information and communications technologies, specialised equipment, technical and administrative assistance. Universities can submit one proposal each, and an unlimited number of collaborative proposals. The proposals may request funding for a maximum of three years.

In August 2005, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, announced funding for nine projects involving over 30 Australian universities. The funded projects are known collectively as the Managed Environments for Research Repository Infrastructure (MERRI) Projects. The Australian Government will invest AUS $19.4 million to fund nine projects under the Systemic Infrastructure Initiative (SII). These projects are part of a suite of strategic infrastructure investments under the Australian Government's AUS $8.3 billion Backing Australia's Ability initiative that also includes the AUS $542 million National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Initiative.

2.3.3 Research Priorities

A *National Research Priority Standing Committee* was established in February 2005. Before explaining the role of this committee some words about its context:
The Prime Minister announced the National Research Priorities in December 2002. The purpose of the National Research Priorities is to:

- Focus investment on research in key areas that can deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits to Australia
- Build on national research strengths while seeking new opportunities in emerging areas
- Provide a catalyst for the formation of teams and networks of researchers across many disciplines in Australia and internationally.

The National Research Priorities are:
- An Environmentally Sustainable Australia
- Promoting and Maintaining Good Health
- Frontier Technologies for Building and Transforming Australian Industries
- Safeguarding Australia

The government decided on a process for reporting on the implementation and success of the National Research Priorities including the development of an outcome-focused reporting framework culminating in an independent review of the impact of the National Research Priorities in 2006-07. In addition to this, the afore mentioned National Research Priority Standing Committee was established. This committee will meet annually and assess the implementation of the National Research Priorities. The Standing Committee will assess the progress of Commonwealth Government agencies in implementing the National Research Priorities and, if necessary, it will suggest ways in which the management and implementation of the priorities as a whole could be improved.

2.3.4 CASR

In January 2005, the Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund (CASR) was introduced. It replaced earlier innovation-oriented programs run by the government. The AUS $41 million CASR programme is part of the Government's AUS $11 billion Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future initiative and is focussed on promoting better teaching, learning, research and innovation by supporting structural reform in the higher education sector and/or collaboration between universities and other universities and education and training providers; business and industry; and communities, particularly, but not exclusively, regional communities, and other organisations. The initial priorities for collaborative projects were:
- Between two or more higher education institutions in course provision
- Between higher education institutions and vocational education and training provider/s, in course provision or in areas related to teaching and learning
- Between universities and their communities, particularly regional communities;
- Between higher education institutions and business/employers or professional associations

In the first round of CASR projects (in August 2005), AUS $3.9 million were directed to projects like:
- Innovative approaches across thirty-eight universities to teaching languages other than English

- The extension of higher educational opportunities for the indigenous population (in Queensland)
- A national, coordinated approach to energy education and research and development
- New patterns of collaboration between industry and universities in engineering education
- The establishment of a collaborative Institute for Enterprise and Regional Development in north-west Tasmania

2.3.5 NCRIS

The National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy is an initiative to bring greater strategic direction and coordination to national research infrastructure investments. Funding of AUS $542 million over seven years from 2004/05 to 2010/11 is available to provide researchers with access to major research facilities, by supporting infrastructure and networks. The NCRIS Committee is developing a Strategic Roadmap to identify areas in which Australia should aim to develop research capability through significant infrastructure investment. An exposure draft of the Strategic Roadmap has been released for public comment. Implementation is being overseen by the NCRIS Committee appointed in August 2005 by the Minister for Education Science and Training.

2.4 Governance

In 2005, the Australian Government initiated national conversations around the fundamental issues of the role and governance of Australia's higher education sector. These conversations involve the Australian Government, State and Territory governments and other key sector stakeholders. A discussion paper was released by the federal government in March 2005. The paper, *Building better foundations for higher education in Australia*[3] examines the current arrangements for responsibility for higher education, in particular the issue of Commonwealth-State responsibility for higher education. The discussion paper explores in greater detail the issues raised in an earlier discussion paper released in December 2004 (*Rationalising Responsibility for Higher Education in Australia*), which in itself was an outcome of the Australian Government's reform package that started with the *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* policy in 2003. The 'Building Better Foundations' discussion paper points to three areas in particular in which current arrangements impede efficiency and innovation. These are the implementation of the National Protocols on Higher Education Approval Processes, universities' powers to engage in commercial activities, and the operation of governing bodies. These are all matters which are regulated by State and Territory governments. Variations between the various levels of government are believed to undermine the universities' reputation for quality and consistency and to frustrate universities' efforts to diversify their revenue sources. One of the issues is whether State governments should move their universities' legislative regime to the Federal level. This

[3]See http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/B365C269-534E-4790-BA64-67D7FC728603/4047/ResponsibilitiesPaper_compiled_onlineversion.pdf, accessed 1/25/2006

would lead to greater national consistency and a more level playing field for universities. Based on the contributions of the various stakeholders to this discussion, the federal government will take further steps.

2.5 Quality

2.5.1 Quality on the international market

Australia is internationally competitive in providing high quality education and training for overseas students both in Australia and offshore. More than 20% of Australia's international education is delivered offshore, and this is increasing. The Australian Government has announced two initiatives to assure the quality of Australian higher education provision in the international market:

- From 2005, enhanced Quality Auditing of Offshore Higher Education will be undertaken by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA); and
- Additional funding of AUS $1.35 million will be provided to higher education providers or groups of higher education providers in the form of fifteen competitive grants of up to AUS $100,000, for Projects to Develop Best Practice Models for Offshore Delivery. In addition, AUS $100,000 will be provided to AUQA to enhance current offshore auditing arrangements.

2.5.2 Building University Diversity

The Minister for Education, Science and Training released an Issues Paper (Building university diversity: Future approval and accreditation processes for Australian higher education[4]) as a first step in a consultation process on future approval and accreditation arrangements in the higher education sector. The Issues Paper considers current approval and accreditation processes ('National Protocols') and also sets out a range of issues including:

- The specific combinations of teaching, scholarship and research which should define universities and other types of higher education institutions
- Whether there should be provision for 'specialist' institutions covering a narrow field of study in-depth rather than a wide range of disciplines
- The role of private and for-profit institutions in the future and to what extent regulation of them should be different to regulation of public or not-for profit institutions
- The scope to create pathways for non self-accrediting institutions to progress to self-accrediting or university status over time if desired; and
- The potential impacts of changing the current framework

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[4] see http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/reviews/building_diversity/building_university_diversity.htm, accessed 1/25/2006

The Issues Paper follows from recommendations of a Review led by Professor Gus Guthrie in 2004[5]. These recommendations called for a national discussion on the agreed understanding of what is a university and what is higher education more generally. The aim of the review in 2004 was to ensure that the procedures for higher education approval are up to standard. The Protocols: '...have been designed to ensure consistent criteria and standards across Australia in such matters as the recognition of new universities, the operation of overseas higher education institutions in Australia, and the accreditation of higher education courses to be offered by non self-accrediting providers.'

The Guthrie review addressed in particular private for-profit higher education because of the great interest in private higher education around the world, both in the establishment of growing numbers of private universities and the increase in non self-accrediting private higher education providers.

3 Austria

3.1 Educational infrastructure

3.1.1 Student's Admission

One important issue being discussed during the year 2005 was the regulation of admission of foreign students to Austrian universities. There used to be an open admission in Austrian higher education, which has lead to a strong inflow of students from countries with restricted admission. This was especially true for the disciplines of medicine and psychologies, which became overrun mainly by German students who did not get admission in their home country. In 2005, the rate of foreign students was at least about 18.7%. A comparison of these relative numbers shows that Austria has the highest rate of foreign students in Europe, and on a world-wide scale it stands in third place (BM:BWK 2005).

In order to regulate the numbers, to secure good study conditions for Austrian students and to avoid overflow, the *Universtitätssteuerungsgesetz* formulated the principle of *'besondere Universitätsreife'* (special admission to university) (§ 65 1 *Universitätsgesetz* 2002). This principle restricted access of foreign students to those who had already been admitted in their home country.

The European Commission (EC) complained about this part of the act because it discriminated foreign students and was, therefore, not in compliance with the European Union

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5 see http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/reviews/guthrie_review/Further_Development_of_the_National_Protocols_for_Higher_Edu.htm, accessed 1/25/2006

(EU) treaty. In fact, the EC argued, it contradicted the central principles of freedom of movement and of equal opportunities for EU-citizens. Thus, in November 1999 the Austrian Government was requested to change the *Universitätsgesetz* in accordance to the EU Treaty. After Austria rejected these requests on several occasions, the issue was taken to the European Court of Justice in March 2003. In July 2005 the final verdict was returned, which obliged Austria to change its *Universitätsgesetz*. The *Universitätsgesetz* was amended in July 2005. Now the *Universitätsberichtigungsverordnung* is integrated in the *Universitätsgesetz* (§ 124a, § 124b, §143 11 University Act): Additional exams before and during the studies are now mandatory for all students, irrespective of their origin, in order to ensure their ability to study. As a second measure, the number of university places will be limited in those disciplines which are restricted by a *numerus clausus* in Germany (BM:BWK: 2005a). Through these regulations, the era of free admission to university in Austria came to an end. Their effects are now widely being discussed (Pechar 2005; Brünner/Hauser 2005). The Austrian government is also taking steps to discuss the effects of border crossing students and cost distribution on the level of the EU (Nationalrat 2005).

3.1.2 Educational Infrastructure

The process of implementing the Bologna declaration is ongoing. As of the end of 2004 about 28.6% of the study courses were transformed to M.A. and B.A. programs. 16.7% of the students in total have been enrolled here. Starting from July 2005 the diploma supplement will be drawn by the universities automatically. The use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is now obligatory for all universities but the rate of implementation still differs.

Excellence

After trying to establish the '*Weltklasse-Universität*' in line with the pressure of internationalisation of higher education the discourse now has shifted to the introduction of the '*Excellenz-Universität*'. This policy is accompanied by the provision of additional funding by the Ministry of Education in order to establish centres of excellence within the universities.

Private universities

Initiatives of establishing private universities are still numerous, even though every second application is rejected by the Accreditation Board for Private Universities. As yet, about nine universities have been founded and 2,500 students are enrolled.

PhD programmes

The adjustment of the PhD-programme has been discussed during the Bologna Seminar 'Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society' in February 2005. From this seminar a set of ten basic principles was drawn, including, amongst others, the advancement of original research, the promotion of innovative structures, increasing mobility of and ensuring the appropriate funding of doctoral candidates. In January 2005 the *Rektorenkonferenz* and the BM:BWK developed a statement concerning the reorganisation of

doctoral education which contains general guidelines about the design of the study programme, financing and funding, international mobility, and the preparation of doctoral candidates for their professional careers.

3.2 Research Infrastructure

The reorganisation and merging of the different funding organisations (see update-report 2004) was fully realised during 2005. The *Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft* started its work mid 2005 and develop working and time schedules for the period of 2006 to 2008. It is in line with the general policies of the BM:BWK as well as the 2002 University Act. The principles of funding were designed to provoke the strategy of excellence and to look for the complementarity of research (*Mehrjahresprogramm* 2006 – 2008 der FFG, August 2005).

3.3 Finance

The national budget for research has once again risen: in 2005 about €5.77 billion were spent, which is an increase of about 8% from the prior year. Now in total 2.35% of the Gross National Product (GNP) are spent for research. Hereby one step of the 2010-Strategy is fulfilled. In order to spend about 3% of the GNP for research in 2010 Austria is planning to increase its expenditures about 8 – 9% per year (ÖHZ 2005/06: 12f). Additional money is also provided for the improvement of the infrastructure of universities (ÖHZ 2005/03: 9).

3.3.1 Student support

During academic year 2003-2004, about 46,000 persons received financial aid, a relative increase of 35% compared to 2001/2002. 22% have been funded. Furthermore 7,000 students were given a grant for their excellent performance, for a total of over €1.6 million.

3.4 Governance

The *Universitätsgesetz* of 2002 has gained full power as of January 2004. The different parts have now been implemented. An amendment to this Act is strengthening the participation of students and of academic staff. Students can now take part in the *Senat*, the *Berufungs- und Habilitationskommissionen* and are responsible for the evaluation of teaching. These evaluation results contribute to the design of the *Leistungsvereinbarung* (see below). Furthermore, students can participate in decisions concerning the allocation of student fees. Academic staff has been franchised for the election of the Senat.

3.4.1 Wissensbilanz

A part of the *Universitätsgesetz* which is not very well known is the introduction of the *Wissensbilanz*. From January 2006 on, universities have to write an annual report on their performance, based on a list of performance indicators the BM:BWK prescribed. There are three aspects of performance (or intellectual capital as it is called): human capital, structural capital and relation capital (position in networks), all captured in over 50 indicators. The purposes of the *Wissensbilanz* are manifold: as an input for the contractual discussions

between BM:BWK and institutions; as an input in internal discussions and evaluations; as a communication device to communicate the university performance to the broader public.

3.5 Quality Assurance

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) is still running; its main tasks encompass the evaluation of institutions and programs as well as monitoring. Despite the AQA has engaged in some international programmes (such as the CHE international ranking of universities) and participates in the Austrian Bologna-follow-up-group, it is not yet clear how its work is linked to the Bologna Declaration.

4 Finland

In 2005 a range of issues has been addressed in the Finnish policy discussions. Many of the topics were already indicated for policy action in the government's development plan 2003-2008 for education (Ministry of Education, 2004). Major issues concern the implementation of the Bologna agreement, higher education funding, a reduction of the time to degree, and cooperation and division of labour between universities and polytechnics. In 2005, several committees have worked and advised on these topics.

4.1 Educational infrastructure

4.1.1 Implementation of the Bologna agreement.

Finnish universities are actively involved in the implementation of the new two-cycle degree system which was officially adopted in August 2005. From 2008 on, students can no longer study under the old programme structure. By 2008 also the ECTS system will be fully implemented. In the transition period from 2005 to 2008, students who enrolled under the old programme structure can complete their programmes the old way whereas new students have to start under the bachelor-master structure.

The Ministry of Education did not yet see the need for a two-cycle degree system in the polytechnics (Pratt, 2005). Also Finnish polytechnic degrees are determined on the basis of ECTS. The status of polytechnic postgraduate degrees in the higher education system as a whole must be determined explicitly. Within these discussions, the role of the polytechnics' postgraduate degrees is rather seen as programmes aimed at students who are already in the labour market for some time, whilst the university masters are mostly intended for entrants to employment.

Both universities and polytechnics have adopted the Diploma Supplement to provide information about the studies completed by the student, the status of the degree and the qualification provided by the degree for further studies and for jobs.

4.1.2 Internationalisation

Finland wants to substantially increase its number of foreign students, both in the polytechnics and in the universities. This requires Finnish higher education institutions to

teach more programmes in English, a process that has been set in motion as already planned in the education development plan (Ministry of Education, 2004).
In higher education, the focus of instruction given in foreign languages has shifted from short exchange periods to full degree programmes. The reasons are the desire to encourage foreign students to remain in Finland after their studies and it is also regarded important in the framework of the Bologna process. Moreover, providing instruction in languages other than Finnish or Swedish has become an established part of the normal courses. The Finnish higher education evaluation council (FINHEEC) has carried out a follow-up evaluation on teaching in a foreign language at Finnish institutions of higher education, which was a continuation of the 1999 evaluation. This follow-up was done in 2005. The follow-up study highlights that much more teaching material is fully available in foreign languages and the language skills of students have improved considerably. But still study-related steering and integration of foreign students into Finnish society should be increasingly promoted as well as the further development of teacher mobility. The linking of teaching through foreign languages with the rest of all higher education offerings should be carefully addressed as a strategic part of the higher education institutions as a whole and become an integrated part of Finnish higher education teaching.

4.1.3 Proposals on university study times

A government ministerial working group proposed that the new Universities Act (implemented on 1st August 2005, and concerns those who have started their studies in August 2005 or later) would include regulations that say that universities will have the duty to provide guidance to the students which enables them to complete the degree within set time limits. Bachelor students would have the right to extend the set time limit by a maximum of one year. Students who take both the bachelor and master degree or only the master degree would have the right to extend their studies by a maximum of two years. Periods of national service and maternity or parental leave are excluded from this regulation. Also excluded from this arrangement is the official "leave of absence" students can use to officially register as absent for at maximum two years. The universities can, at their discretion, grant an extension to the study time on the grounds of completing the degree. If a student, who has lost the right to study, should later wish to continue his or her studies, he or she should re-apply to the university.
Next to this, personal study plans are introduced to facilitate student guidance and promote advancement in studies. Furthermore student financial support arrangements will also stimulate students to make study progress (see in the funding section).
The duration of studies was more limited in the polytechnics right from the beginning. They only get funding for students who study in the norm time and thus have to keep statistics of students who study in the normative time, and those who exceed it.

4.1.4 Committee: Lifelong learning must be taken into account in universities

In 2005 a Ministry of Education committee proposed universities should improve lifelong learning. This requires specific lifelong learning strategies, developing the Open University path in student admissions and improving the continuing education opportunities of people

with an academic education. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Open University offer degree-oriented studies. The committee also proposed that university-level continuing education could be privatised in "university-owned companies" if universities like to do so.
Polytechnics are also involved in life long learning policies. They for example have separate quotas for entrance of young and mature students in basic degree programmes. In addition, their continuation degrees are meant specifically for those already in the work force. Polytechnics also provide a wide selection of professional development courses as well as "open polytechnic courses".

4.1.5 A co-operation model for universities and polytechnics

The Council of State recommended in 2005 that universities should focus on larger entities in teaching and research with a stronger focus on excellence and international competitiveness. This would support networking and improve the efficiency of management and evaluation. Resources in higher education should be targeted at larger entities. Polytechnics, in turn, would be developed as more regionally significant institutions.
Nevertheless, co-operation between universities and polytechnics should be stimulated, particularly through networks. The Ministry of Education has launched three projects to study co-operation (models) and the division of labour between universities and polytechnics, and the possibility of higher education consortiums. They will be implemented in Kuopio, Oulu and Lappeenranta and aim at reducing overlapping operations and defining the profiles and focuses of each higher education institution. Most recently there has been a lot of discussion on the mergers of universities and polytechnics, but no definite results yet.

4.1.6 Number of new technology students to decrease

A Ministry of Education working group proposed in 2005 that in the field of technology education, the number of educational institutions and degree programmes should be reduced, and education and research should be concentrated in larger and more competitive units. The working group said that the university and polytechnic units providing technology education today are too small. Over the next five years, the number of first-degree study places in technology would gradually be reduced from 8,000 to 6,500. The main goal for universities would be to reduce class sizes. The aim for all units is that a maximum of one hundred students would attend basic courses. This reform would help optimise first-degree education and speed up the time it takes to complete the degree. Larger units would mean more teachers and smaller class sizes, and in addition to that, more "critical mass" in research.
Within the old Finnish discussion whether there are too many or too few engineers, currently the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Engineer's Union say there are too many engineers, with the former also saying that engineers are lacking necessary skills.

4.1.7 Committee: an electronic joint application to universities

It is proposed that an application system will be introduced which allows applicants to apply to nine programmes or courses with just one form in the future. These should be put in order of priority. Applicants would receive additional points for the first choice of a subject or

programme. It is proposed that the joint application system will be launched in two phases. In addition, the Committee thinks that the joint application can be arranged twice a year. The new system would make the application rounds in different universities more uniform. The first electronic joint application would start at the beginning of 2008. This application system is developed separately from what has already been in use for the polytechnics.

4.2 Finance

4.2.1 University funding

A 2005 committee on performance-based management of universities proposes that university core funding should be added with project and performance-based funding. The committee proposed that the focus in the funding system be shifted to strengthen conditions for research and researcher training. In the 2007–2009 agreement period, university core funding should be kept at a stable level throughout the three-year period, with more emphasis on quality and performance. Criteria describing research, researcher training and artistic activity should be supplemented with new criteria relating to the university's activity in research, postgraduate places, the target number of degrees and certain quantitative aspects of artistic activity. The weight of single doctorates should be reduced. The education criterion should be related to the targets set for Master's degrees only. Regarding the social service mission, it is proposed that the current allocation criteria be retained. The total amount should be fixed at the present level, as should the field-specific cost coefficients used in Master's degrees. Project funding should be developed as strategic funding, but with closer links to the Government Policy Programmes and the education and research policy programmes of the Ministry of Education (profiles, inter-university cooperation and infrastructure development).
Performance-based funds should take account of impact, cost-efficiency and intellectual resources, as well as quality.

4.2.2 Student financing

Students who will start higher education in 2005-2006 or later will be eligible for a student loan tax deduction if they complete their studies within the normative duration of studies and have more than €2.500 in outstanding higher education debt on completion of their studies. This is an extra incentive to stimulate study progress.
Furthermore, the government loan guarantee received by undergraduates will increase from €220 to €300 a month and the maximum amount of housing expenses to be taken into account in granting the housing allowance to € 252, taking effect on 1 November 2005.
A Ministry of Education working group has proposed that term fees be introduced to university and polytechnic degree students from countries outside the EU and EEA as of 1 August 2007. According to the proposal, the decision on fee amount would be left to the discretion of universities and polytechnics themselves. The fee would be from €3,500-€12,000 per academic year.

4.2.3 Agreement on the new university payroll system

In 2005 the Ministry of Education and university trade unions have reached an agreement on the new university payroll system. The system's main principle is that the pay is determined on the basis of the job's demands, personal performance and qualifications. Universities will assess the demand levels of the jobs and personal performance in spring 2006. The system does not interfere with traditional academic evaluation practices.

4.3 Research

In its development plan for education and research (Ministry of Education, 2004) the Ministry of Education put a lot of emphasis on the further development of international, national and regional networks. Finland wants to actively contribute to the Nordic and European research areas. To this end, the Ministry, higher education institutions, the Academy of Finland and other funding agencies will cooperate to create favourable conditions and centres of excellence. Also more evaluation studies will be conducted to monitor the developments. In addition, the commercialisation of research, regional innovation and focus on basic research will be strengthened.
In 2005, the Council of State underlined this position. The challenge is to develop internationally competitive research and development activities in fields most important for the national economy and the wellbeing of Finnish society. As such, the Finnish university system should not expand in the next few years but rather focus on international excellence in the areas where Finnish research is already strong.
In 2005, national programs for nanotechnology and biotechnology have been established.

5 Flanders

5.1 Educational infrastructure

5.1.1 Bologna follow up – 'Academisation'

In Flanders, the follow up of the Bologna Declaration led to a new two cycle system, replacing the old ternary system. The old one cycle studies of the Hogescholen changed into professional bachelors and the two cycle studies were transformed into academic bachelor and masters. University studies were also transformed in academic bachelors and masters. There are no professional masters-programmes at hogescholen foreseen. These changes called for clarifying the concept of 'academisation' in order to distinguish between professional and academic oriented studies (Smolders, 2005). A workgroup was asked to work on this clarification.

The general definition of academisation is the embedding of education in scientific research, but needs to be translated per study into certain specific aims. The workgroup stated that for academic studies, staff needs to be of academic level and a certain percentage of staff needs to hold a doctorate. Furthermore, curricula need to be adapted to an academic level. Working on

academisation of studies is considered a shared responsibility of hogeschoolen, universities, the association they belong to, and the government (Werkgroep academisering 2005).

5.1.2 Bologna follow up – prolongation of study duration

As a part of the Bologna follow-up process, the prolongation of certain programmes from four to five years has been discussed. In the Flanders, Bachelor education lasts three years and, in principle, is followed by a one year Masters-level study. Two-year master programmes are created for those programmes that

- used to be five year programmes;
- used to be four year programmes but meet the following criteria:
    - prolongation is necessary due to international developments
    - a change in national or international conditions of recognition for obtaining a degree or professional qualification
    - the international labour market asks for a Master degree containing more than 60 ECTS
    - the study takes more than 60 ECTS in surrounding countries. If this is the case, the policy in the Netherlands, France, Wallonia and Luxemburg is decisive. (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2005)
    - There are many students pursuing a doctorate in a certain field of study and their Masters should prepare them for the Doctorate
    - Quick evolution of the field of study, because of which the study has to be prolonged
    - Institutions must possess the necessary education and research capacity to offer a full quality prolonged study

This year several natural science programmes have been prolonged to five years because of an increasingly internationally oriented labour market and the fact that these studies typically last five years in other countries. Additionally, many students in these fields subsequently pursue a doctorates, which appear to be necessary to gain employment (Persbericht Vlaamse Overheid 2005).

5.1.3 Recognition of prior experience

As a result of the discussions in higher education in Europe on the recognition of prior experience, it has been proposed in Flanders to recognise prior experience by offering titles for professional qualifications (Persbericht Vlaamse Overheid, 2005). However, the Flemish proposal is not aimed at higher education, but secondary professional education and includes qualifications such as 'hairdresser' and 'industrial painter'. The Ministry has offered €400,000 to develop standards of recognition and € 2.87 million for future assessment centres (Persbericht Vlaamse Overheid 2005).

5.2 Research infrastructure

5.2.1 Large knowledge centres for innovation

Recently, the Flemish Parliament agreed on a new policy concerning the support for large knowledge centres for innovation. The underlying assumption for this new policy is that research potential is not fully realised within individual or small subsidised research projects. There is a need for larger knowledge centres and infrastructures aimed at working strategic basic research, collective research, diffusion of knowledge and large research, and test facilities. Key to the new policy is openness and cooperation in the diffusion of knowledge (Vlaamse minister van Economie 2005).

5.3 Finance

5.3.1 Scholarships for foreign students

Regulations concerning scholarships for foreign students, whose parents are working or have worked in Flanders, have been widened due to a ruling by the European Court of Justice (Arrest Meeusen). Another sentencing by the European Court made clear that regulations concerning scholarships should also allow for scholarships for foreign students who have fully integrated in their current country of residence (Arrest Bidar). Furthermore, the European Parliament has accepted resolutions widening regulations concerning scholarships and the EU has issued a guideline stating that victims of the slave-trade should be accepted in education.

Six categories of foreign students may apply for scholarships in Flanders:
The already existing categories are:

- Children of EU-citizens who work or have worked in Belgium as an employee
- Students who are not EU-citizens, but have a permanent residence permit

The new categories are:

- Children of EU-citizens who work or have worked in Belgium as an 'independent'
- EU-students who work or have worked in Belgium as an employee or 'independent'
- EU-student who have been staying in Belgium for 5 years uninterrupted
- Victims of slave-trade

It is expected that the widening of the regulation will lead to an extra 330 applications for scholarships, which will cost the Flemish Government around € 500,000.(Persbericht Vlaamse Overheid 2005)

5.3.2 New law on funding

After the structural reform, the funding of higher education has been frozen. The government is working towards a new funding mechanism that should be up and running by 1 January 2007. The proposal made by the Minister of Education draws a less complicated mechanism

in which funding will consist of four elements: a fixed element, incentive funds for specific policy priorities, a teaching related variable part and a research related variable part. The fixed sum will be given to institutions that achieve a minimum threshold of ECTS. This part is planned to be around 5% of total funding but not to exceed 20% of the total institutional budget. The funds for the achievement of policy priorities have a similar size. The teaching related part is based on four criteria: number of new entrants (bachelor), credits achieved, degrees awarded. The research related part at universities is directly related to the teaching related part: it is 35/65 of the teaching part. For the *hogescholen*, the calculation of the research related part is not really determined yet. The total budget used to be open ended for the universities and fixed for the *hogescholen*. In the proposal an intermediate solution is chosen (a click-system): different parts of the budget may evolve in different ways

6 France

6.1 Educational infrastructure

The *Comité de Suivi de la Licence* has reported on the process of introducing the licence (Bachelor) in the French system during the period 2002-2004. Their recommendations refer to organisation and coordination of the educational processes, the provision of information and guidance to new entrants and students.

6.1.1 Reorganisation of IUFM

The Institutes Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres IUFMs (the teacher training institutes) were independent of universities since their creation in the early 1990s. In each *académie* (a regional entity) there is a IUFM and they are accountable to the recteur of that *académie*. Central government now wants to bring the IUFMs into the universities (as specified in the *project de loi sur l'avenir de l'école*). This move would mean loss of autonomy regarding the hiring of staff and other specific features. It would also mean that the funding would not anymore come directly from the state but from the university. The proposal of the Conference of IUFM directors to create inter-university institutes (within each *académie* one, comprising a number of universities and one IUFM) would reduce the dependency of one university.

6.1.2 Recognition of professional experiences

Recognition of experiences and competences has grown. There are two forms of recognition: one that acknowledges competences that enable prospective students to enrol, and a second (relatively new) type (known as '*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*', or VAE), which translates professional experiences into credits or even full degrees. The latter, initiated in 2002, has grown to 2780 validations in 2003 and 3165 in 2004 (around 80% of the universities now use such a validation scheme). In 2004 more than 40% of the validations were full diploma recognitions. The former has diminished to nearly 15,000 15000 in 2003

and 13695 in 2004. Most recognitions refer to the *Diplôme d'Etude Supérieures Spécialisées* (DESS) and *Licence* programs[6]. (NdI 05-03)

6.2 Research infrastructure

The proposed *Loi d'orientation et de programmation de la recherche* (LOPR) is seen as the major instrument in the renovations of the French R&D structure, triggered by the 2004 protests. The new law will probably come into force in early 2006.
In the LOPR, the minister has introduced the *Pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur* (PERS), which bring together universities, research organisations and *Grandes Ecoles* within a region, as well as the *Parcs de recherche*, which bring together organisations that develop start-up.
To bring these two new structures together yet another label or structure was invented: the *Pôle de compétitivité (à vocation technologique)*. These new *pôles de compétitivité* should trigger growth and develop ecosystems that will help France consolidate its position in international competition (12/01/05).
Universities are concerned that high level research will be concentrated at these few PERS, effectively excluding small and medium sized universities. Students had their concerns regarding the PERS because of the potential link between PERS and the creation of Master programmes. If such a link would emerge, master programmes would become scarce and selective (source: LME Mars 2005, p 13-14).

In February 2005, the *Agence National de la Recherche* (ANR) was established. This organisation will become important in allocating the € 6 billion that the French government has provided for the period 2005-2008. In its first year, the ANR allocated around €540 million to 1,400 research projects (Ministère délégué à l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche 2005)

The protests of 2004 and the debates and protests on the proposals on the LOPR have overshadowed another change in the French research landscape, namely the reorganisation of CNRS. CNRS will remain an organization with its own research facilities, its own research staff and its own research policy (and will not be transformed into a R&D funding agency). CNRS will also engage in privately funded research, and the way its research centres (or laboratories) are organised will change.

6.3 Finance

[6] Source: Note d'information 05.28 La validation des acquis dans l'enseignement supérieur en 2004, Ministere de l'education nationale et enseignement superieur et recherche (2005)

The new law on public finance (*Loi Organique relative aux Lois de Finances*) gives public agencies more leeway in the allocation of public budgets (e.g. by providing funds in lump sums). Along with that, a number of new accountability rules come in, like the obligation to furnish annual performance reports. This new law will become active from the 2006 budget. The provision of lump sum budgets takes place in the framework of a larger contractualisation policy. To what extent this will have an impact on the funding of French higher education is not yet clear. The increased financial autonomy is seen by the CPU as essential for the autonomy of universities in respect of their research policy. However, the central government 'trusts' the universities only with a limited leeway. A real lump sum budget was refused and central government is still in charge of permanent staff that will be allocated to universities. The difference with the previous situation is that the central government will not any more allocate individual positions to institutions but a package (*masse indiciaire*) in which the institution will be allowed some freedom in choosing the level of qualification of staff.

6.4 Quality issues

The CNE, the national evaluation agency, has changed the way it reports its findings. The new reports are intended to be more open to the general public

7 Germany

On the 18th September 2005 a new parliament was elected and a new government has started to work on the 22nd of November 2005. Higher education policy in Germany expects radical changes if the Constitution will be amended as proposed by the coalition. The main consequences would be the abolishment of the German Framework Act for Higher Education as well as the introduction of opportunities for *Länder* to deviate from federal law on issues of admission and degrees. Furthermore, the *Länder* will receive more freedom in financing higher education in terms of *Hochschulbau* (construction of higher education facilities) and *Hochschulplanung* (higher education planning). To what extent the amendments regarding personnel in public service will affect higher education policy is not yet foreseeable.
The coalition agreement includes general statements. First, the coalition's goal is to increase the public and private expenditure on research and development up to three percent of the GDP by 2010. Second, the federal government's higher education policy is driven by the following mission statements: autonomy, excellence, responsibility, freedom and competition. Third, the federal government wants to lift up German higher education into the international top and also to strengthen the quality of higher education and research in the breadth. Fourth, regarding admission, the new government's goal is that 40 percent of one cohort enters higher education. Fifth, the new government wants to increase its effort to bring academics back to Germany, improve career opportunities of young scholars and to give young scholars more independence in their research. Sixth, the government seeks to enhance women's career opportunities. Seventh, in terms of the negotiations to a General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the new government formulates its position as such: 1) the clear distinction

between public and private sector in education should be maintained, 2) legal claims of foreign provider should be prevented, 3) consumer protection and quality assurance should be guaranteed and 4) national priorities in education should be conserved. Eighth, the new governments will strengthen the co-operation of university and public non-university research. Ninth, the government aims to pay the full costs of research projects.

7.1 Educational infrastructure

7.1.1 Bachelor Master

The introduction of Bachelor and Master study programmes has been progressing. For the winter semester 2005/2006 2159 BA-programmes and 1459 MA-programmes are being offered at German higher education institutions[7];). These come up to around 32 % of all offered programmes in Germany. The number increases continuously[8].
Some issues connected with the new programmes are not solved yet or left to further developments. Such an issue is the transition between a BA-study course to a MA-study course. Some *Länder* (e.g. Hamburg, North-Rhine Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg) would like to introduce quota for BA-graduates advancing to MA-study courses because they fear that all students go on and costs increase. Of particular interest is the transition from Bachelors to Masters study. The Bachelors degree is the standard qualification. Germany has not, however, set a fixed quota for transition to study at Masters level. What proportion of graduates with Bachelors degrees will study for a Masters degree immediately after graduating or following a period of employment depends on graduates' individual interests (which are also influenced by the demands of the jobs market), on the qualifications required by the various higher education institutions for entry to Masters programmes and the capacities available at locations that offer Masters degrees. Further consideration regarding expansion of the system must take account of observations on student behaviour in the two-cycle system'[9]. On the other side, proponents of some disciplines argue that students need to study five years to be adequately trained (see psychology or chemistry). Furthermore, a side effect of the more structured study courses can be that student mobility is reduced because there is less time to be mobile. A solution discussed is to integrate an obligatory semester in a foreign country into the study courses.

In the beginning of 2005, the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* (HRK) started a discussion on allowing BA-graduates to start a doctoral course upon graduation. To this date, however, it is still the universities that decide who may participate in a doctoral course.

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[7] See http://www.hochschulkompass.de, data from 09/13/2005, accessed 01/25/2006

[8] See http://www.hochschulkompass.de; http://www.bmbf.de/pub/national_report_bologna-2004_2005.pdf; http://www.hrk.de/de/download/dateien/StatistikBAMAHRKWiSo2005_06.pdf, p.7, accessed 01/25/2006

[9] http://www.bmbf.de/pub/national_report_bologna-2004_2005.pdf, p. 13, accessed 01/25/2006

The *Kultusministerkonferenz* (KMK) decided in April on a framework of qualification of German higher education degrees (*Qualifikationsrahmen für Deutsche Hochschulabschlüsse*). This framework is seen as a step in making higher education degrees more transparent. The qualification framework contains a general description of the qualification profile of a graduate, a list of targeted learning outcomes, a description of graduates' competencies and skills and a description of the formal aspects of the training level. The framework includes a list of qualification requirements for Bachelor-, Master- and Doctoral-degrees.

7.1.2 Staff

As of January 1, 2005 the reforms on staff structure and salaries (5th amendment of *Hochschulrahmengesetz, Professorenbesoldungsreformgesetz*) have been implemented. All new appointed professors start with the new professorial categories (W2 and W3). These new *Besoldungsgruppen* (salary classes) imply a lower basic salary with the opportunity to receive performance bonuses. The *Länder* have implemented the new federal law in various ways. In some *Länder,* new appointed professors are not allowed to receive performance bonuses in the first years whereas in others they can receive these bonuses immediately. The other disappointment for non-professorial researchers is that universities start to hire personnel on former C1-position with a salary of salary class 2a from the *Bundesangestelltentarifvertrag (BAT)*, which means a salary decrease on those positions of € 500 per month. During the introduction of *Juniorprofessuren* the federal government has given up to € 60,000 until the end of 2004. However, a compromise between the federal government and the *Länder* to prolong the financial support of new junior professors was not achieved after that date.

7.2 Finance

7.2.1 Tuition fees

The *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (Constitutional Court) ruled in 2005 that the federal government is not allowed to forbid tuition fees in the Higher Education Framework Act. The Constitutional court's ruling allows the *Länder* to introduce tuition fees in their own ways. The first *Länder* (Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Northrhine-Westphalia) announced the introduction of tuition fees as of 2006 or 2007. Conservative politicians agree on setting up a maximum tuition fee of € 500 per semester as a first step.

The Constitutional Court's decision paves the way for *Länder* to introduce tuition fees. The *Länder* willing to introduce tuition fees (which are the most conservative-lead *Länder*) agreed that starting fees should not exceed € 500 per semester. Moreover, while the introduction of tuition fees in these *Länder* was scheduled to begin in 2006, some *Länder* (most notably Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) have decided to wait until 2007[10]. The *Länder* are also struggling with the introduction of complementary scholarships for financially disadvantaged

[10] See http://www.bmbf.de/de/3211.php or http://www.studis-online.de/StudInfo/Gebuehren/tuition_fees.php, data of 12/21/2005, accessed 01/25/2006

students. On the other side, some (state-owned) banks offer special credits for students. The issues of social responsibility and student financing are still unsolved. Two examples show the complexity: First, in order to offer relatively cheap credits the banks want to have a deficit guarantee from the state for those students who are not paying the money back. The federal state is not willing to do so. Second, the (federal) state's financial aid for poor students (*Bundesausbildungsförderung or BAföG*) is under threat by tuition fees because the financial aid will be partly used to pay the tuition fees and, thereby, BAföGs' aim to support student financing is undermined. Furthermore, conservative politicians have been thinking about abolishing BAföG and to put the resources into scholarships.

The main developments regarding student financial aid are dependent on the policies of the coming federal government and the amount of *Länder* introducing tuition fees and at what conditions. The new conservative government in Northrhine-Westphalia, for example, announced that it wants to allow universities to raise tuition fees if so they wish. In cases such as this one, the picture of German higher education becomes even more diverse. Another issue will be student mobility between those *Länder* having tuition fees and those not having them. Some preliminary figures on student mobility show that students are applying for study places in *Länder* without tuition fees[11]. Consequently *Länder* without tuition fees would like to have compensation for students from other *Länder*.

7.2.2 Financing higher education and research

In March 2004 the minister of education and research, Edelgard Bulmahn, announced an initiative to support excellent universities with € 1.9 Billion for the period 2006 to 2011. The federal government would give 75 percent of this amount and the other 25 percent should be supplemented by the *Länder* where the promoted universities are located. In June 2005 the federal government and the *Länder*-governments agreed on the conditions of this *Exzellenzinitiative*. This gave rise to a long dispute which was due to the political disagreements between the social-democratic lead federal government and the conservative *Länder*-governments (mostly in the South of Germany) on the general issue of *Länder*-autonomy in educational issues and the conditions of the programme itself. As a matter of fact, the rising disagreements between the federal government and the *Länder*-governments, which resulted in blocking the federal government's political initiatives, was one of the reasons for chancellor Schröder to ask for a vote of no confidence, the subsequent suspension of the parliament and the elections of September 18.

As mentioned above a more major development is the agreement of the federal government and the *Länder* on the *Exzellenzinitiative*. € 1.9 Billion will be spent by the federal government and the *Länder* in the coming five years to support 'excellent' research. The aim of the programme is to stimulate a process of improved performance by using a competitive

[11] See http://www.bmbf.de/de/3207.php, accessed 01/25/2006

procedure and resulting in a project-based support of high-level research in German higher education. The programme is split into three components:
Project-based support of graduate schools (on average € 1 million per graduate school plus 20 percent overhead funding; up to 40 schools will be supported)
Project-based support of *Exzellenzcluster* to promote high-level research (on average € 6.5 million plus 20 percent overhead funding; up to 20 *Exzellenzcluster* will be supported)
Support of *Zukunftskonzepte* for the project-based expansion of high-level university research (on average € 21 million plus 20 percent overhead funding; up to 10 concepts will be funded)
The programme will be organised by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) in cooperation with the *Wissenschaftsrat* (WR).

Another initiative, to strengthen German research (the pact for research and innovation) continues: the *Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung* (BLK) decided to increase the budget for the DFG and Max-Planck-Society by 3 percent to € 2.6 Billion (for both organisations) in 2006. The decision about the budget of the 84 institutes of the *Wissenschaftsgemeinschaft Gottfried Leibniz* (WGL) will be made in November.

7.3 Governance

The reform of higher education in Germany will be less substantiated by the coalition agreement than by structural changes in the constitution. The proposed reform of shared responsibilities between federal government and the *Länder* allows for much more individual higher education policies within the *Länder* than it has been before. The federal responsibilities will be restricted on issues of admission and degrees as well as co-financing and monitoring.

The political effects of the Constitutional Court's decisions on new federal regulations in the Higher Education Framework Act are far more influential on general German higher education policy than the immediate implications for policies regarding staff structure (decision in 2004 on 5th amendment of the Higher Education Framework Act) or tuition fees (decision in 2005 on 6th amendment of the Higher Education Framework Act). The Court's reasoning on rejecting both the federal government's attempts to regulate higher education is based on a constitutional change dating back to 1994. The slight change in the text of the Constitution favouring the *Länder* in specific policies (such as education) has become a major threat to the federal government's opportunity to regulate in such policies. Germany's higher education system will become more diverse and less easy to monitor. As the Constitutional Court judged in the case of tuition fees, the federal government is allowed to intervene to guarantee Germany's social and economic unity. Consequently the federal governments can act retrospectively but less prospectively.

8 The Netherlands

8.1 General Policy Framework

In the Higher Education and Research Plan (HOOP 2004), the government defined as important tasks for higher education to contribute to the transition towards the knowledge society, a strengthening of the international positioning in Europe and globally, and the complexity of society. At the same time a new act on higher education, which would enable higher education institutions to fulfil these tasks, was announced. In 2005 the government launched proposals for a new law on Higher Education and Research which is intended to replace the existing law of 1993. The new law has been subject of much debate in various settings with stakeholders and will be considered in Parliament in 2006.

In these documents the following ambitions for higher education and research have been formulated:

- Maximal participation and more highly qualified people—in the context of the Lisbon-objectives the government aims at increasing the enrolment ratio in higher education to 50% in 2010
- Quality as a key element to respond to societal trends—generally, the quality is considered to be good, but more excellent research and education is necessary to create a stronger profile internationally
- Young adults should be able to function adequately in a complex society. They must be equipped to take initiatives, to be entrepreneurial, and to shape their own learning processes. Combinations of learning and working are becoming increasingly important.
- Higher education institutions should contribute more to the innovative capacity of the Dutch economy as well as societal sectors such as health and education. This requires more interaction, a permanent tuning of higher education to labour market needs, more attention to activities that are focused on knowledge valorisation
- Although the quality of research is good, more focus and concentration is needed, more competition and research dynamics, and more opportunities to attract and keep more researchers and other knowledge workers

In several of the subjects below reference will be made to these ambitions and how government wants to achieve them.

8.2 Educational infrastructure

The total number of students in 2005 increased to nearly 550,000 students compared to approximately 505,000 in the previous year. The HBOs have grown much faster than the universities although the latter are recovering after a dip around the year 2000. Of the total number of students, 36% (200,000) attend universities and 64% (350,000) attend HBOs.

8.2.1 Raising access

As said before, the current ambition of the Dutch government is to increase the participation in higher education to 50% in 2010 and consequently increase the proportion of highly qualified people in the workforce. The Dutch Educational Council (Onderwijsraad, 2005) supports this policy. In order to achieve this goal the council advises (1) to make the access routes to higher education as broad as possible, (2) to create more variety and differentiation in higher education in terms of course provision and study duration, and (3) to stimulate access of non-traditional groups to higher education.

Compared with some other European countries, the Dutch participation rate is reasonable, although the methods used vary internationally (Kaiser, 2005). However, generally the success rates of Dutch students are relatively low. About two thirds of the students actually obtain a diploma and several sources[12] emphasise that this ought to be improved. Also the study duration of students has not diminished. Students are overall 25 years of age when they graduate, which was the same in 1995 (CBS). Various measures to reduce the study duration have presumably not had the intended effect.

8.2.2 Selection

Selection continues to be an important issue. Higher education institutions are gradually receiving more autonomy in the selection of new entrants. They can offer the first year courses on different levels and according to the new proposals they will be legally allowed to refuse students who do not meet the quality standards required for the higher levels. Furthermore, the number of honours programmes for especially selected students has this year further extended. The interest for these programmes exceeds generally the capacity of these programmes, so institutions can be quite critical about whom they want to select.

8.2.3 The Higher Education system in the international context

The Bachelor and Master structure is now standard in virtually all programmes and disciplines. Issues concern the transition of BA-graduates to Master programmes both in terms of quantity and quality. For HBO-bachelors, universities have set up special programmes to facilitate such a transition. Some trends related to this new structure are becoming visible.
The introduction of the Bachelor/Master structure has aroused much concern about the international recognition of the Dutch grades, mainly because of the binary Dutch system which has weakened the international position of Dutch HBO students. An International 'Committee Review Degrees' was established to review the current Dutch degree titles and to indicate degrees which are internationally adequate, transparent and robust. One of the major proposals of this committee is a system of degree titles with two types of suffices to bachelor

[12] National bodies (like AWT, NVAO) which all refer to national statistics ('Kennis in Kaart')

and master titles: 'arts/science' and subjects. The first depends on the extent of the research connection and normally refers to a university degree. Subject suffices apply predominantly to HBO titles and refer to the professional connection (e.g. MA in Economics). A strict demarcation between universities and HBOs, however, is not envisaged since the programme content rather than the type of institution would define the name of the Degree. According to the Committee's proposals HBO-programmes which have a sufficient connection with research can adopt the suffices 'arts/sciences'.
So far discussions in Parliament have questioned the need for new degree titles. Although the (applied) research role of HBO is broadly supported, it is found unclear how this can be translated into new titles for HBO-programmes. There is a need to develop further criteria for research connection which justify the suffices 'science/arts'. The Ministry advocates further inquiry whereby also criteria for research connection as developed in view of the process of accreditation by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) should be taken into account. These criteria correspond with internationally valid definitions for levels of qualifications in the European context (cf. Bergen conference paper: 'A framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area').
Finally, the international dimension of higher education can be strengthened by increasing the possibilities for joint degrees, degrees granted by an institution in collaboration with one or more institutions nationally or internationally. Joint degrees are also stimulated by the European Union through the Erasmus Mundus programme. A joint degree of a Dutch HBO and university-programme, however, is not possible in the new law, since this is considered incompatible with the binary structure.

Associate degree

A rather new phenomenon is the debate on the development of sub-degree programmes leading to separate Associate Degrees, in the first cycle (two-years). Experiments will start in HBOs in 2006/07 in order to explore demand for these short-cycle programmes, especially those from vocational education and training. It is envisaged that this degree is embedded in a bachelor degree programme in order to facilitate further progression in higher education.

Life long learning

In order to increase the number of higher qualified people in the knowledge society, there is more pressure from policy to increase the involvement by those already in the workforce and who are unemployed in lifelong learning. The integration of the 'world of learning' and the 'world of work' is advocated, for example, by stimulating work-based learning (or 'dual programmes') in HBOs as well as in universities (particularly on the master and doctoral level). EVCs (recognition of acquired competencies) are increasingly used as an important instrument to facilitate this development towards lifelong learning.

8.2.4 Personnel

Academic personnel in universities show a rather balanced age distribution. 29% of personnel is older than 50, and 40% older than 45. As expected, the higher ranks (professor and UHD) are overall older. In HBOs 40% is 50 years and older, and even 57% is older than 45 years, a

fact which entails risks for the continuity but at the same time increases the chances for a more dynamic staff policy.
One of these changes is the relatively new position of lector in HBO, a highly-qualified individual with significant expertise in the subject field and in the professional domain. The leading idea is that lectors are not appointed as isolated staff members, but as leaders of teams. This is supposed to upgrade staff regarding their teaching and applied research activities.
A 2005 evaluation of the lectorate showed the importance of this new position for the HBOs, although it was stressed that the lectorate should primarily have a firm basis in the professional domain rather than in the academic field, with a focus on the innovative capacity of enterprises.

A special concern is the position of young researchers, doctoral students and post-docs. In the report *'Onderzoekstalent op waarde geschat'* (Research talent assessed), the minister presents a coherent policy about the research training, the careers of young researchers, and the position of women and ethnic minorities in science. Major elements of this policy-document are:

- The training of researchers in research schools (inter-university collaboration) and the development of graduate schools at universities are both considered of value. There is some tension between these two institutional settings, but at the same time there are chances for fruitful co-operation and synergism between them
- In order to control the quality of research training, universities are required to assess the quality of the organisational setting in which promotion trajectories take place. In the new higher education law this (external) quality assessment task will be assigned to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences
- More diversity in promotion trajectories is needed: not merely for an academic career but also for employability outside science. Also the development of 'professional doctorates' is strongly advocated
- Continuation of special programmes for young researchers, such as the 'innovation impulse' which provides young talented researchers with financial opportunities to develop their own research into a research programme, and the Aspasia programme for women scientists to develop their research further, as well as new programmes such as the Rubicon-programme which is especially intended for those who are in the period between their doctoral traineeship and post-docs
- More attention for career perspectives of young talent in science, such as the development of tenure tracks and the maintenance of the employee status of research trainees. This is a reaction to the VSNU which, in its 2004 paper, advocates more diversity regarding employment conditions of young researchers, including the student status (scholarships and zero appointments)
- Stimulation of geographical and inter-sectoral mobility of researchers, international mobility, participation in European Framework Programmes. More generally the attractiveness of the Dutch trainee system both nationally and internationally should be maintained and where possible strengthened

8.3 Research infrastructure

Debates in the last few years on the steering and funding of scientific research have been intensified in 2005. In the 2004 update we reported possible shifts of the research budget from the basic allocation to the budget of the research council, a movement which universities have opposed.

Now the emphasis of the debate is on establishing thematic or targeted research areas both in the fundamental research at universities as well as research funded by the research council. One of the key elements is whether and to what extent greater competition and incentives are needed in order to foster a more dynamic research landscape. In mid 2005 the Minister of Education and Science installed an independent committee on 'Dynamics'. One of the issues concerns the role played by research assessments in the programming and the allocation of funds for university research[13]. What is the relationship (if any) between the outcomes of the external peer reviews and university research programmes? Do such ratings affect decisions about structure, funding and staffing dedicated to research?

Although research assessments provide overviews of the quality, productivity, relevance and sustainability of research at Dutch universities, it is not clear to what extent this should have implications for funding. To date, performance-based funding of research does not take place on a large scale, but there is clearly a movement towards developing performance indicators, including the academic and societal impact and networking of research (Jongbloed et al, 2005). The Advisory Council on Science and Technology Policy (AWT) advocates such as movement, the ministry is interested, but universities are generally more reluctant.

Two other issues have received increasingly more attention. One is the stronger involvement of universities in European research programmes which require a financial matching with university funds. This matching has been criticised by universities as well as by the AWT because this withdraws (lump sum) funds intended for fundamental research.

The other issue concerns the research function of HBOs. The new law recognised this function, but a clear distinction with university research is maintained. In this way the new law follows the view as expressed by the AWT. Whereas university research is fundamental (developing new insights and in-depth knowledge), research at HBOs should focus on new applications of existing knowledge. It should be demand-led and short-term applicable. Another distinction is that HBOs will not be eligible for basic research funding.

[13] This allocation may concern both the allocation of funds (on the national level) between universities and the allocation within universities between faculties or research groups

8.4 Finance

8.4.1 Funding mechanism

The Minister has introduced plans for a new funding mechanism based on the notions as stated in the 2004 update report on more flexibility, more freedom of choice, and more quality. Some higher education institutions were allowed to select their students and to set their own tuition fee rates. The purpose of the reform is to transform the higher education system into a more differentiated and market-driven system where students and institutions obtain more freedom and more responsibility. The new funding system will be based on the provision of learning entitlements. This allows students to 'cash' their entitlements for (parts of) education at any place and time. Such a demand –led system, already operational in Australia, aims to increase the flexibility and freedom of students within the available time limits. Students that run out of entitlements will have to pay higher tuition fees. Higher education institutions will receive public funding on the basis of number of students with learning entitlements. This demand-driven system is supposed to turn students into critical consumers, and higher education institutions into responsive providers, offering quality and meeting the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student population. The new funding system still has to be discussed in Parliament in 2006. The major consultative body on legislation ('Raad van State') has been quite critical.

Related to this new funding mechanism is the obligation of higher education institutions to inform their (prospective) students properly about the courses they want to take. In the new law this right of students to have information is formalised and institutions are in collaboration with other organisations to provide information that is comparable and transparent. In this way the position of the student is acknowledged as a critical consumer.

8.4.2 Student support

The system of student support will continue to provide grants and loans. This year two changes are worth mentioning:

- The time period for graduates to pay back their study debts has been extended from 15 years to 25 years
- The student support system will also be valid in other countries. So far students can only study abroad in the context of an international exchange project, but from now on students who want to study at a foreign institution without being enrolled at a Dutch institution are eligible for financial support.

8.5 University governance

Current policy is focused on creating framework conditions which enable higher education institutions to accomplish the ambitions as mentioned before in the general policy framework. A new way of interaction between government and higher education institutions, based on new ideas about steering in the public sector, is proposed. The government should allow institutions to function more autonomously according to their own insights and preferences

with less governmental interference. The government focuses primarily on the functioning and the strategic orientation of the higher education system as a whole and her responsibility is focused on quality, accessibility and effectiveness of the system. Individual institutions are responsible for the education, personnel and resources.

Compared to the current law which is dominated by the relationship between the government and the institutions, this new law emphasises to a lesser extent this relationship. The attention is more focused to strengthen the position of students, employers and other stakeholders as actors in the steering network. The government facilitates the playing field on which higher education institutions and their stakeholders operate, and higher education institutions are supposed to maintain intensive interactions with all the parties concerned and to enhance their responsiveness to changing demands from students, society, and the labour market.

The new law advocates a different approach to governance. Institutions are charged with promoting particular interests, but exert freedom on how these are to be achieved. The government's role is restricted to setting the framework conditions and steers on the basis of the outcomes. More innovation and less bureaucracy implies less interference from the government, and where regulation is needed this should not be overly prescriptive but should allow greater freedom to those concerned to give their responsibilities an independent interpretation. This view is based on trust of institutions to care about what they are supposed to do. The responsibilities of higher education institutions concern access and admission to higher education, curricula and learning objectives. This freedom can be used to respond to societal developments and to changes in the international environment, thereby contributing to the ambitions for Dutch higher education and research.

In 2005 the law on the internal university governance structure, which dates from 1997, was evaluated. This law enables universities to modernise their organisational structure in order to facilitate effective and efficient decision-making processes.
This new structure tends to transform the traditional task-oriented organisations, in which academics have a large amount of professional autonomy, into market-type organisations, which stresses the managerial aspects of education and research. Integrated management on all organisational levels, clear internal authority relationships, a new supervisory board at the top of universities and generally executive leadership are among the key elements of this new governance structure.

One of the outcomes of the evaluation study among policy-makers, academic and other staff, and students of Dutch universities was that a strong university management is not viewed as negative (De Boer et al). A large majority are satisfied with the current governance structure, although not enthusiastically. Dutch universities have clearly strengthened their executive leadership, without categorically excluding staff and students from key decision making processes. Members of the university community appear to be able to use the legal framework in a proper way, although some issues deserve more attention. Of these concerns one is the level of participation and involvement of academics in decision-making processes. Another concern is the role of the supervisory board which is unclear to almost everyone in the university.

8.6 Quality assurance

As in the current legislation, the new law states that higher education institutions are primarily responsible for the quality of education. They should be able to determine the quality norms by taking into account the national and international standards, developments in the subject areas as well as the mission and profile of the institution. The accountability of higher education is assured through the accreditation system as carried out by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). The first round, which is still underway and will proceed up to 2009, concerns accreditation of all programmes on an individual basis. Since experience shows that the implementation entails substantial bureaucratic burden to all those involved, the implementation will be adjusted in the short term within the legislative framework. In the long run the system might change into institutional accreditation for those institutes that have excellent records for quality and quality assurance of programmes. The accreditation of new programmes will continue to be carried out for each programme separately. So far 115 new programmes from both public and private institutions were submitted of which 42 were approved (Dittrich et al 2005).

In the new law the government has responsibility for the quality of higher education as far as the standards are concerned according to which the Dutch higher education (both nationally and internationally) is transparent and of discernible quality. The proposed degree structure and the development of joint degree (see above) can be seen in this context.

In line with this, the accreditation process increasingly takes place on a European level. The NVAO has contributed to the establishment of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). The participating organisations have agreed on a 'code of conduct' and on the involvement of peers for external reviews. The NVAO is also an active member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in higher education (ENQA) and adheres to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. These initiatives and developments are clearly in the context of enhancing the international mobility of students and researchers and the emergence of the European Higher Education Area.

This year there have been some initiatives to develop a ranking system of institutional types and profiles, following the examples in Germany and Austria. However, these initiatives are outside the accreditation process as ranking of programmes or institutions is not its purpose.

9 Portugal

In Spring 2005 there have been general elections in Portugal, leading to a reorganisation of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES). Because of this many of the reforms and policies announced in the previous period have been delayed.

9.1 Educational infrastructure

9.1.1 Sub degree programmes

In 2004 and early 2005, there have been debates on upgrading the short, two-years technical vocational programmes that are offered by secondary education institutions. By the start of 2006 it is still unclear where the short term technical programmes will be located. The Ministry indicated in January 2006 on their website that the issue is on their agenda. In consultation with the polytechnics and universities the Ministry wants to define where these short term technical courses will be accommodated (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2006).

9.1.2 Degree structure/ Bologna

Although the Government has not yet officially defined the new degree structure, from debates on the introduction of the Bologna structure in Portugal it appears that the Portuguese have accepted the basic three cycle structure. However, how this structure will be implemented in the Portuguese context is still being discussed. All key stakeholders are invited to contribute to this discussion through the presentation of the ante-project in the Ministry website serving as a starting point to several initiatives on the subject such as the conference '*O Processo de Bolonha e as suas consequências na engenharia portuguesa*' (The Bologna Process and its consequences for Portuguese engineering) hosted by the *Associação Nacional dos Engenheiros Técnicos* (National Association of Technical Engineers).

MCTES envisages the following structure: first cycle licentiatura (*licenciatura*), second cycle the masters (*mestrado*) and the third docturamento (*doutoramento*). At the polytechnics level the first cycle will take 180 credits corresponding to six semesters (three years) and a bachelor degree will be awarded. The university sector will offer a *licenciatura* program as first cycle which will take 3 or 4 years depending on the subject. The *licenciatura* in Polytechnics is supposed to take 180 credits, but can be extended to values between 210 and 240 credits in special cases related to the European practice or by employer demand (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2006).

Several institutions may start in the academic year 2006-2007, offering programmes according to the new degree structure. One year later, all higher education institutions are required to offer newly structured programmes. In this context, in December 2005, the *Universidade Nova de Lisboa, the Institutos Politécnicos de Setúbal e Santarém*, and the *Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada* (two universities and two polytechnics) formed a consortium that intended to optimize their courses in line with the Bologna declaration. How the process will look like in the end may also depend on the experiences with the new accreditation system, which is envisaged to start by the end of 2006 (see below).

9.1.3 Access

The low position of Portugal in the international tables on educational attainment, was one of the major reasons for the Ministry to propose a policy to increase access to higher education. A broad range of instruments was discussed. The first one is the validation of prior learning and professional skills in the form of credits. These credits have to enable people who lack the formal certificates and diploma's that give entrance to higher education to enable them to continue education at secondary level and tertiary level. The whole issue is however still in an early stage; throughout the different education sectors there are discussions on how to structure and award credits to prior learning and professional skills.

Another option to expand access to higher education is by bringing in more mature students. In that perspective, entrance examinations for mature students (i.e. > 25 years) are being discussed. In the current situation all students have to pass both a final exam at secondary school as well an entrance exam at the university. The Ministry proposed to abolish the entrance exam for mature students and give the universities the freedom to define their own selection criteria for this group. The Ministry believes that universities will be able to think of more suitable entrance criteria that include theory and practical skills and that mature students should be selected largely based on their Curriculum Vitae (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2006).

The Ministry proposed also financial incentives to increase the number of mature students. The ministry defines the number of students that may access universities. Due to this rule the number of mature students entering university is limited. In order to increase the number of mature students and to enhance their possibility to successfully pass exams, the ministry proposes universities to allow an additional 10% for mature students on top of the 'general' students (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2006).

9.1.4 Internationalisation

There are two proposals that are aimed at enhancing internationalisation[14]. The first proposal refers to the introduction of the possibility to universities to offer programmes and take exams in a language other than Portuguese. The second proposal introduces the option to offer joint degrees by foreign and national Portuguese universities (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2006).

[14] See Ministry of Education at http://www.mces.pt/ , accessed 01/25/2006

9.2 Funding

9.2.1 Tuition fees

In the university sector the *licenciatura* courses tuition fees should be fixed by the universities, albeit, fees may not be different from the tuition fees established by reference higher education institutions in Europe in the same areas of learning.

The new degree structure may have also consequences for tuition fees. Higher education institutions may decide that certain bachelor and master programmes are 'integrated programmes'. For integrated bachelor and master programmes higher education institutions are not allowed to ask different fees for the bachelor and the master programmes. For non-integrated programmes, tuition fees may differ for bachelor and master programmes. The minimum and maximum for the bachelor programme will be set by the government.

9.2.2 Institutional funding

In 2005, the Ministry, in consultation with the *Conselho dos Reitores das Universidades Portuguesas* (Portuguese University Rector's Council) and the *Conselho Coordenador dos Institutos Superiores Politécnicos* (Coordinating Council of the Polytechnic Higher Institutes), prepared a new formula to fund higher education institutions to be implemented in 2006. This formula was defined within the government program objectives that aim to support higher education institution strategies that seek to transfer its qualifications in line with these institutions activities to similar terms as the European Union average levels. The main objectives underlying the budget were: to open the access to higher education, to promote strategies that prevent drop outs and retention, the need to increase the quality of the faculty, including the improvement of higher education research and to improve the effectiveness of the social support system for students.

The preparation of the budget for 2006 introduces a formula that has two fundamental changes when compared to previous formulas. It is distributive in the sense that it determines a specific funding for each institution based upon the number of students, cost specificities and activities results. The formula also provides more weight to quality criteria. The newly proposed 2006 budget is more performance based that the previous ones as it aims to increase the graduation rate and to improve quality.

9.3 Quality

Currently programmes are dependent on the previous accreditation system. According to this system, public institutions can establish new programmes and inform the Ministry about it. While the Ministry can decide not to fund a programme, the university is still entitled to offer it. Most recently, however, the Ministry has developed a policy according to which institutions will only be allowed to offer accredited programmes. If a programme is not

accredited, it cannot be offered by the university. Programmes must be accredited by the national accreditation agency, which does not yet exist.

The Ministry started a process that aims to implement an international evaluation of the Portuguese higher education sector in order to perceive its overall performance based on internationally recognized best practices. For this purpose several international organizations such as the OECD, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), European University Association (EUA) and EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) were involved. In this sense, the OECD is in charge with the systemic evaluation of the Portuguese higher education system within the European framework. The quality of the system is to be evaluated by the ENQA. This will include the analysis of accreditation practice and assurance of quality as well as the evaluation of the existing Portuguese accreditation agencies.

Additionally, a voluntary program of institutional evaluation will be launched and coordinated by EUA in collaboration with EUROASHE. This evaluation will be performed in the institutions that require it as long as they submit an evaluation request to EUA. The Ministry may provide funding assistance to these institutions after evaluating their proposals. It is expected that the evaluation exercises are terminated by December 2006. This process will be reviewed after a two years period so that a periodic analysis of the higher education system by the OECD can be guaranteed. This will perceive the evolution of the higher education system as well as understand if the objectives proposed by previous exercises were met (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2006).

In the meantime private institutions are asked to make their programme more transparent to reduce bureaucracy. Currently it would be very difficult to accredit these programmes at private institutions since the number of programmes they offer is extensive. Privates must create better conditions to be accredited. At this moment they offer multi-degrees, experiment with names (e.g. they have more than 100 types of business programmes).

Finally, the ministry is proposing that programmes should not be denied unless strictly legal arguments are brought forth to do so. On the contrary, the current system (which will be changed) enables the Ministry to reject programmes on the basis of 'national necessity', such as the presence in the country of numerous similar offerings.

10 Sweden

After a number of years of little change, 2005 has marked a strategic shift in the direction of Swedish higher education. Much of this has been driven by the need to ensure that Sweden's reputation for delivering high quality education maintains its status in light of greater market competition both within and beyond Europe. As one of Europe's leading nations in terms of investment in research, the government has also proposed a number of strategic investments

in areas that are designed to strengthen the country's scientific capacity, better link academic research with practical applications and foster the development of the now-popular Centres of Excellence.

10.1 Educational infrastructure

10.1.1 Program and degree structures, internationalization, higher education admissions[15]

A proposed bill (2004/05:162) would create a number of important reforms to Sweden's higher education system. The changes are expected to be implemented by the fall of 2007. These are outlined below.

The structure of education programmes and degrees will change from a two-cycle to a three-cycle system (undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate) in order to ensure that Swedish qualifications retain their value on the international market and to put Sweden more in line with the Bologna Mandate. The changes include the introduction of a two-year Master's Degree ('masterexamen'), a special category of degrees for artistic fields will be introduced alongside the traditional professional and general degrees, the requirement of specialization in major subject fields for Bachelor's and Master's degrees would be removed and replaced by requirements that 'express specialization in qualitative terms,' independent projects will be required for all degrees done at the first and second levels and the distinction between professional and general degree requirements will be more clearly defined. Finally a number of current degrees will be abolished or subsumed in the new general or artistic degrees.

Most of the above changes are expected to be incorporated directly into the country's Higher Education Act. In addition, the bill would also revamp the credit system so that it is compatible with the European Credit Transfer System.

The government also plans to provide the Swedish Net University Agency with SEK 30-million (€2.8 million) to support higher education institutions' efforts to broaden recruitment. Institutions will also be encouraged to focus their efforts on attracting students from working class families and into longer-duration higher education programs.

Admissions regulations will be simplified and made fairer. Basic eligibility requirements will be changed to make requirements for applicants from upper-secondary and upper-secondary adult education programs more consistent. Higher education institutions will be able to impose their own special eligibility requirements for students entering programs not leading

[15] Sources: (1) New World – New University: Summary of the Government Bill 2004/05:162. Factsheet, the ministry of Education, Research and Culture, U05.030. June 2005. (2) Important Reforms for Higher Education. Press release 14, June 2005. Government Offices of Sweden www.sweden.gov.se

to a professional degree. Higher education institutions will be given the flexibility to determine the admissions criteria for up to 20% of available study places for beginning students; such criteria may include the use of specific work experience as a qualification. Finally, upper secondary courses in mathematics and non-English modern languages will be given more emphasis in higher education admissions decisions.

A new internationalisation strategy would make clear that higher education institutions must conduct 'active internationalisation efforts' to enhance the quality of their education offerings. Obstacles to internationalisation must be eliminated, in Sweden and abroad.

10.2 Research policy[16]

Government bill 2004/05:80 offers a number of changes to Sweden's academic research environment. The new bill would give special attention to areas that the government would like to see become 'internationally outstanding.' These include medicine and technology as well as environmental and sustainable development. Between 2005 and 2008 the government expects to increase investment in these three areas by SEK 400-million, 350-million and 210-million respectively (€42.6 million, €37.2 million and €22.3 million).

To promote the development of Centres of Excellence in all scientific fields, the government plans to increase the overall level of investment in such activities to SEK 300-million (€31.9 million). This is expected to take place between 2006 and 2008. Funding will primarily be competitively allocated (through blind review) and grants should be available for up to 10-year periods and be on the order of SEK 10-million (€1.1 million) each.

Given the a substantial portion of Sweden's education and research faculty are expected to retire in the coming 15 years (45%), the country also plans to make further investments in basic research funding to spur the training of new faculty with appropriate scientific and teaching training. The plan is to increase basic appropriations for research and postgraduate education by SEK 521-million (€55.4 million) over the period 2006-2008. An additional SEK 150-million (€16 million) is to be allocated to the Swedish Research Council, the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, The Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning and the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems to pay for postdoctoral positions. Finally a further SEK 100-million (€11 million) will be allocated to graduate schools for the same purpose.

[16] Source: Research for a Better Life: Summary of the Government Bill 2004/05:80. Factsheet, the ministry of Education, Research and Culture, U05.019, March 2005

10.2.1 Knowledge transfer between academe and industry

In order to improve knowledge transfer between academic institutions and industry, the governments seeks to create a more effective holding company structure for higher education institutions. Such holding companies would receive extra funding on the order of SEK 60-million. An additional SEK 120-million (€12.8 million) will be allocated to cooperative programs between the state and industry (through the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems). In order to strengthen industrial research institutes, the plan is to inject another SEK 110-million (€11.7 million). Finally, an additional SEK 10-million will be allocated to support access to research for Small and Medium Enterprises.

10.2.2 Other strategic measures

Between 2005 and 2008 the government plans to increase funding for research infrastructure by SEK 42-million (€4.5 million). In terms of investments in more specialised activities, the plan is to invest an additional SEK 12-million into resources for gender research, SEK 10-million into space research, SEK 10-million into education science and SEK 5-million into design research, mainly to establish a research school in the area.

10.3 Finance[17]

As part of the government's 2005 fiscal policy bill a number of training investments measures are currently being considered. These include:

- Beginning in the fall of 2005, making an extra 1,000 study places available in advanced vocational education schemes. Total cost: SEK 180-million (€19.5 million) between 2005 and 2008
- The addition of 500 new education places at folk high schools for people who are considered long-term unemployed. Total costs SEK 30-million (€3.2 million)
- Immigrants with qualifications from a foreign university will be offered a one-year supplementary course at Linkoping and Malmo Universities. Total cost: SEK 20-million (€2.2 million) divided between 2005 and 2006

11 United Kingdom

Higher education sector has seen some changes in 2005 in the UK. The major policy documents and discussions relate to the introduction of the variable tuition fees and to the changes in research funding. Important debates have been focusing on full economic costing, knowledge transfer, fair access, teaching and research quality.

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[17] Source: Spring Fiscal Policy Bill: Focus on Jobs and Welfare. Press release 14, April 2005. Government Offices of Sweden www.sweden.gov.se

11.1 Educational infrastructure

11.1.1 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Strategic plan

The HEFCE has revised (April 2005) the Strategic plan 2003-2008 within the broad national policy framework established by the White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education'. It sets the broad plans to implement the most important policy goals. The principal seven areas of higher education are addressed:

- Widening participation and fair access
- Enhancing excellence in learning and teaching
- Enhancing excellence in research
- Enhancing the contribution of higher education to the economy and society
- Building on institutions' strengths
- Developing leadership, governance and management
- Excellence in delivery

The plan expects all the institutions to achieve national objectives in widening participation and fair access, sustainability of high-quality learning and teaching ad contributing to economic and social development. However, not all institutions are expected to carry out research.

11.1.2 E-learning

Following the White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' the government asked HEFCE to work to embed e-learning in a full way within the next 10 years. The context for HEFCE's strategy is following also the government's strategy 'Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services', March 2005.

A 10-year strategy to integrate e-learning into higher education was published in March 2005 'HEFCE strategy for e-learning'. The strategy is intended to enable all universities and colleges to make the best use of information and communications technologies in their learning and teaching. Around GBP 31 million (€ 45 million) in capital funding will be available to higher education institutions to support investments in e-learning. Also a total of GBP 8 million (€11.6 million) will fund projects which aim to embed e-learning in institutions individually or through collaboration, and to provide case studies.

Over 2005 HEFCE has been consulting with its partners and stakeholders on the development of their strategic plan for 2006-2011. At the end of 2005, a draft strategic plan 2006-2011 is prepared and open for comments. The final version is planned to be published in April 2006.

11.1.3 Office of Fair access (OFFA) – Strategic plan

Following the Higher Education Act 2004 the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was established in order to ensure that the introduction of higher tuition fees in 2006-07 does not have a detrimental effect on widening participation and that institutions are explicitly committed to

increasing the participation rates of under-represented groups. Higher education institutions have been required to submit access agreements to OFFA for approval. These agreements show how they will invest some of their additional income from fees into attracting applications from low-income students – through bursary and other financial support and outreach work.

OFFA prepared its strategic plan 2005-2010 which lays down three core aims:
To support and encourage improvements in participation rates in higher education from low income and other under-represented groups
To reduce as far as practicable the barriers to higher education for students from low income and other under-represented groups by ensuring that institutions continue to invest in bursaries and outreach
To support and encourage equality of opportunity through the provision of clear and accessible financial information for students, their parents and their advisers. (OFFA, December 2005)

11.2 Research infrastructure

11.2.1 Enhancing excellence in research

The future 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) related funding still is one of the most important issues in the HEFCE Strategic plan. Building on the strength of research excellence (supporting and rewarding the world-class research) and sustainability of research are the two key aims. Thus, the future goal is to maintain the logic of selective funding 'our funding for research will necessarily continue to be highly selective' (HEFCE strategic plan, p.32) that is based by reference to assessments of research excellence and to maintain and develop the research infrastructure.

11.3 Finance

11.3.1 Variable tuition fees

The variable tuition fees, to start from 2006 following the Higher Education Act of 2004, have been highly debated both within the academic community as well as among the 'consumers' , namely by students and their parents. The key debates in the THES have been the competition between the universities in terms of the size of bursaries and policies of not charging lower than 3000 pounds (14 January) and the possible increasing demands from students for academic quality and services. (3 June)

11.3.2 Funding formula

HEFCE started consultations with universities on the aims of the review of the teaching funding. In its Strategic plan it indicates that the teaching funding needs to be reviewed due to upcoming variable fees from 2006-2007. HEFCE 2005/21 details the progress of the review and establishes the aims of the new method.

The teaching funding is allocated through a funding formula. HEFCE currently reviews it with the aim to reduce the number of special initiatives with restrictions on how the money is spent. After the consultation, a review of the teaching funding method has been proposed in autumn 2005 and will be discussed until 13 January 2006 by higher education institutions and stakeholders. It will operate from March 2006. HEFCE is also planning to conduct further consultation on specific issues in autumn 2006. The earliest that HEFCE can implement any elements of a new method will be for the academic year 2007-08.
The aims of the new method relate to those characteristics of learning and teaching in higher education that can be susceptible to influenced by HEFCE funding (nearly 60% of HEFCE funding goes to learning and teaching). According to the new aims, the new formula funding method should help to:
Ensure an appropriate capacity of learning and teaching in higher education at a sector-wide level.
Ensure and promote a high standard of teaching quality and academic standards.
Enable learning and teaching in higher education to respond to the diverse needs and demands of students, business and wider society.
Enable the higher education sector to provide innovative learning and teaching opportunities
Enable the sector to make higher education accessible to all those who could benefit from it
Enable the higher education sector to make the best use of public money to enhance the student learning experience.

11.3.3 Research Funding

Following the 'Science and innovation investment framework 2004-14' of the Department of Trade and Industry, in early 2005 Lord Sainsbury informed the institutions about the increase in research funding to research councils so that they can provide the 80% of the full academic costs to all the funded projects during the next decade as well as increase the PhD stipends. As reported in the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) this would amount up to GBP 3.3 billion to universities and research institutes by 2007-08 (THES March 4, 2005). This change in research policy has been acknowledged also in the HEFCE's strategy.

The implications of the full academic costing are still to be seen, but some of them are debated in universities, especially in university management circles and among researchers. The major concern is increasing competition and also the implications for the research funded by charities is not clear, since charities may not have enough funds to cover full academic costs.

Another research funding-related issue is the new formula for 'knowledge-transfer funding'. A new funding approach to help universities apply their knowledge, ideas and expertise in response to market needs and for public benefit was announced on November 30, 2005 by Science and Innovation Minister, Lord Sainsbury. A total of GBP 238-million (€349.4 million) is being allocated to cover the years 2006-08 under the third round of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), to increase collaboration between higher education institutions and businesses through the UK. The HEIF is moving to a new format, with three-quarters of funding distributed by formula, and the remainder through open competition.

During the previous two rounds of 2001-06 the funding was allocated through open competitions. Funding will be allocated to universities under the new formula based on three criteria:

- Number of academic staff
- Amount of external income generated through knowledge transfer
- Knowledge transfer activity levels

In order to smooth the change from a competition to formula-based funding, a transitional safety net will make sure that no institution gets less than 75% of its previous allocation under the HEIF.

The Universities UK welcomed the introduction of a formula funding allocation which should provide greater stability and allow higher education institutions to plan their knowledge transfer activities more confidently over a longer period. (HEFCE website)

11.3.4 RAE 2008

During 2005, the discussion and importance of RAE have been increasingly apparent in the UK. Between July 16 and September 19 2005 consultations on the 2008 RAE draft criteria and working methods took place. The consultation was structured to seek views about the extent to which the panels and sub-panels have addressed the key reforms for 2008 RAE. The key comments were welcome to the extent consistency had been achieved between main and sub-panels, the weightings of the different components of the quality profile, the ways in which the panels will assess applied and practice-based research, and the panels' consideration of the vitality and sustainability of research in their respective disciplines. The responses were sought from higher education institutions, subject associations, professional bodies, and other interested parties.

RAE 2008 will provide quality profiles for research across all disciplines. Submissions from institutions will be assessed by experts in some 70 units of assessment. The main body of the assessment will take place in 2007-08, with outcomes to be published by the funding bodies in December 2008. As in previous exercises the evaluation of submissions will be based upon expert review by discipline-based panels considering written submissions from higher education institutions.

However, there are some key changes, for example:

Timing: Subsequent RAEs will follow on a six-year cycle. For the 2008 exercise, the census date is 31 October 2007, and closing date for submissions is November 30, 2007.

Submissions: to be eligible for submission, research outputs in all disciplines must be published between January 1, 2001 and July 31, 2007. Submissions may list no more than four outputs for each named researcher; a lower maximum may be set by some panels.

Results: results will be published as a continuously graded quality profile for each submission, at the sub-panel level. The previous 7 point rating scale, when departments were assigned grades (1-5*), will be replaced by a profile in which a percentage of the research activity will be judged to meet the standards of 4*, 3*, 2*, 1* or unclassified

According to the HEFCE's officer, RAE 2008 differs from its 2001 predecessor. The main changes include:

- Two–Tier panel structure
    - Main Panels with sub-panels in cognate areas
    - Ensure consistency of approach, more readily assess interdisciplinary research
    - Make better use of international advisors
- Graded Quality Profile to replace Grades
    - Reduce 'cliff edge' effects of old grade system
    - Smoother profile for future funding formulae
    - Less 'game playing'

On October 13, 2005 the UK funding councils announced 50 international and additional members of the main panels for the 2008 RAE. The international and additional members will work with the main panel chair and the 67 sub-panel chairs to provide a strategic overview of the work of the sub-panels in their respective main panel areas.

International members are practicing researchers with a high level of knowledge and expertise in research across a broad discipline area internationally, including substantial experience in at least one country outside the UK. They are people whose judgment is likely be respected in the higher education community in their subject area. Additional members of the main panels are experienced either in commissioning research or in using research in industry and commerce, policy and practice. (RAE 2008 website)

The pressure on higher education institutions in anticipation of the 2008 RAE is increasing. The THES has repeatedly reported the redundancies in job places, closing of faculties and hiring of high numbers of new academic staff (head-hunting) taking place among different universities. The competition for excellent academic staff and the in-house closure policies in the sector are apparent in order to boost next RAE results since the draft criteria for the exercise have been unveiled this summer.

11.3.5 Scotland – the new funding council

The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) was established on October 3, 2005 by the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. The two previous funding councils (established under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992) were dissolved – the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. The general duty of the new Council is 'to exercise its functions for the purposes of securing the coherent provision by the fundable bodies of a high quality of fundable further education and fundable higher education and undertaking of research among the fundable bodies' (FHEA 2005[18]) This involves assessment and enhancement of the quality of further and higher education as well as if it finds appropriate – carrying out efficiency studies of universities and further education colleges. The implications of this restructuring remain to be seen, since currently it has to develop its Action Plan for 2006 as well as its longer term strategy to be set out in Corporate Plan 2006-09. The key to smooth 'transition' here is the Joint Corporate Plan 2003-06 that was prepared and implemented by the two

[18] See http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2005/50006--b.htm#2, accessed 01/25/2006

previous funding councils. The new council 'inherited' the final year of this Plan, which means that the funding will not change for the next year.

11.3.6 Welsh Language Scheme

The Welsh Language Board approved Welsh Language Scheme of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) on May 3, 2005. The Scheme is aimed at the public as a whole and the higher and further education institutions to which HEFCW provides funding.

The Scheme has two main focuses: services to the public in Wales and HEFCW's role in funding teaching and research in the higher education sector. The Scheme means that HEFCW policies and plans will support the maintenance and development of Welsh medium and bilingual higher education within the higher education sector in Wales. More concretely, it will:

- Assess the linguistic consequences of any new or revised policies and initiatives when formulating them
- Ensure that new or revised policies and initiatives will promote and facilitate the use of Welsh wherever possible, will move the organisation closer to implementing the principle of equality at every opportunity and are consistent with the Scheme and do not undermine it
- Ensure that measures contained in the Scheme are applied to new or revised policies and initiatives when they are implemented
- Consult with the Welsh Language Board in advance regarding proposals which will affect the Scheme. (HEFCW 2005[19])

11.4 Governance

Since the establishment of the OFFA, the debates in UK started concerning 'good' and 'bad' institutions. Another concern is that of increasing state regulation of universities through imposed on them access agreements. (THES 2005, December 2005)

11.5 Support of Employability

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published its White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' in March 2005. This White Paper builds on the Government's first national Skills Strategy, published in July 2003. The White Paper develops the DfES' strategy for ensuring that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses. It also helps individuals gain the skills they need to be employable and personally fulfilled. HEFCE will support graduate employability and the contribution of

[19] See http://www.elwa.org.uk/elwaweb/elwa.aspx?pageid=458, accessed 01/25/2006

higher education in meeting employers' needs for graduate level knowledge, skills and qualities.

12 Reflection

The higher education policy discussions are heavily influenced by the two major international European processes started around the turn of the century: the Bologna process and the Lisbon process. Although these processes started as non-coercive processes, leaving countries and higher education institutions with a large amount of leeway to manoeuvre,[20] they have gradually permeated into the national and institutional policies. These processes have created a supra-national context that is hard to escape.

A wide variety of issues are reported in the previous sections. How far down the influence of the supra-national processes seeped in and how much of a national policy does remain are intriguing questions. Although the underlying report is not set up to answer these questions, the information presented does allow some (new) vistas and reflections that may contribute to a better understanding of national policies in an international context.

We start with summarising the main issues in the two supra-national processes and discussions after which we shall focus on how those issues are taken up in national policy debates.

12.1 The supranational policies

12.1.1 Bologna: mobility through transparency

In June 1999 in Bologna, 29 European ministers of education signed a declaration towards a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Since then, the so-called 'Bologna Process' has become a 'buzzword' of higher education reform in Europe. According to the Council of Europe, the Bologna Process is the most important and wide ranging reform of higher education in Europe since the immediate aftermath of 1968. The ultimate aim of the process is to establish an EHEA by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications.

In May 2005, European ministers responsible for higher education set out the achievements and challenges in the Bologna process so far. At that Bergen conference[21] they expressed satisfaction with a number of key accomplishments, including the large-scale implementation of the two-cycle degree system amongst the Bologna signatories, the provisions made by most countries to develop Quality Assurance (QA) systems according to the criteria set out in

[20] The start of the processes were the signing of the agreements by all national ministers.

[21] The European Higher Education Area -Achieving the Goals: Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen 19-20 May 2005, available at http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf, accessed 1/25/2006

the 'Berlin Communiqué'[22], and the fact that most countries have ratified the 'Lisbon Convention' [23] on degree recognition. They also identified challenges lying ahead: obstacles to access between cycles, low student involvement and international cooperation in QA as well as the need for higher education institutions to introduce systematic internal mechanisms correlated to external QA, the need to strengthen research, increase mobility, ensure access, and cooperate internationally, were listed as the main challenges.

The Ministers agreed that by 2007 a set of intermediate priorities ought to be largely implemented. These priorities include:

- the implementation of the standards and guidelines for QA as proposed in the ENQA report[24]
- the implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications,
- the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at the doctorate level, and
- creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

By 2010, they re-iterated, a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on the principles of quality and transparency should be in place.

As for the qualification framework, there has been a slight diversion from the strict three cycle model. The 'Bologna Follow-Up Group' (BFUG)[25] had recommended that short cycle programs (120 ECTS) would become part of the qualification framework (as part of the first cycle). The Ministers however decided not to include them as such but to include, within the national context, intermediate qualifications as a possibility[26].

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[22] Realising the European Higher Education Area, Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, in Berlin on 19 September 2003, available at http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Communique1.pdf, accessed 01/25/2006

[23] Council of Europe - UNESCO joint Convention, 'Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region', Lisbon, 11 April 1997, available at http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/02-CoE/970411Lisbon_con_165.pdf , accessed 01/25/2006

[24] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area', Helsinki, 2005, available at http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050221_ENQA_report.pdf, accessed on 01/25/2006

[25] The BFUG consists of representatives of all member states of the Bologna Process plus the European Commission, with the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE, ESIB and UNESCO/CEPES as consultative members. See http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/BASIC/BFUG.HTM, accessed 1/25/05

[26] http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/ The framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area

12.1.2 Lisbon: competitiveness through access and excellence

Unlike the 'Bologna process', the 'Lisbon process' is not only about higher education. It addresses education and research, in addition to labour market and economic policies. The main driving force in the higher education fields are:

- expansion of access in order to produce an increased number highly educated workers (especially in fields such as Math Science & Technology)
- growth in R&D investment
- more autonomy for the higher education institutions

Early 2005, the 'mid-term Commission review' took place in Brussels[27]. This review took stock of the developments in the Lisbon Process and highlighted directions for the future. The Commission, while expressing 'realistic optimism' about Europe's future, also set out the key challenges. From the review, it emerges that more needs to be done to ensure Europe's attractiveness for investors and workers, to support knowledge and innovation, and to create more and better jobs. To support knowledge and innovation, more money should be spent on Research and Development (R&D), both in the public and private sectors, the EHEA should be completed, and improved technology transfer between universities and industry should contribute to the dissemination and creation of knowledge. Life-long learning is seen as a key instrument in enhancing labour mobility and flexibility.

To sum up, the major themes that the supra-national processes have produced are the overarching national qualification structure, international mobility of students and graduates, access to higher education (both ensuring it and expanding it), excellence in teaching and research, expansion of R&D and quality assurance/ recognition.

12.2 National policies and policy instruments

The list of themes brought forward by the supra-national processes is relatively wide and coincides very much with the lists of national higher education policy themes. This may suggest that these processes have influenced the national agendas and forced the national policies into the international straightjacket. It may also be argued that the national policy themes are reflected in the international higher education policy agenda and that the latter follows the former. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. The complexity of the field (many actors, many issues, different time horizons) and the dynamics of such a field make it difficult if not impossible to identify clear causal relations; it creates 'chicken and egg'- problems that we do not want to solve here.

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[27] Communication to the Spring European Council, Working together for growth and jobs—A new start for the Lisbon strategy, Brussels, 02/02/2005, available at http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/pdf/COM2005_024_en.pdf, accessed 1/25/2006

The close relation between supra- and national level is less visible if we look at how these policy themes have been addressed in terms of the use of concrete policy instruments. How the goals are to be achieved is up to the national policy makers. It is on the level of instrumentation of policies that the most interesting dynamics and differences between countries occur. It is clear that some themes are formulated in a rather concrete and instrumental way (like the three-cycle program structure) and that in those themes the options for national policy makers are more limited, but even there we can find considerable diversity in the way national policymakers operate to achieve the goals.

In the remainder of this section we shall describe the communalities and differences in policy instruments used and debated in 2005 to achieve the 'overarching' policy goals.

12.2.1 Educational infrastructure

2005 saw a continuous progress in the adoption of three-cycle degree systems across Europe. However, cross-national differences in the achievement of this goal persist. In Australia, the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders the three cycle structure is fully implemented, although in the former two countries this is not a consequence of the Bologna process. In Austria, Germany and France, the process of phasing out the old structure is continued, whereas in Finland, Sweden and Portugal the transitional period has just started or has just been decided on. It is foreseen that by 2008 the new degree structure will be operational in all countries.

National differences arise also in the way short courses in higher education (SCHE) and third cycle programs are dealt with.
Short courses are since the Bergen Conference part of the overarching qualification framework, but in a number of countries they do not (yet) exist (in Austria, Finland, Flanders, Germany, the Netherlands). In the Netherlands, experiments have been announced regarding the introduction of short courses (associate degrees) but in the other four countries no clear SCHE policy has emerged. In other countries some types of SCHE exist but only in a few countries there is active policy on this issue (Portugal, the UK and France).
The diversity in the way third cycle programmes are organised is even larger, especially in countries with binary structures (Finland, Flanders, Germany and the Netherlands). The traditional PhD degree is the obvious degree programme in third cycle at universities, but how the 'non- university' sector contributes or may contribute to the third cycle is in most of the binary systems heavily debated.
Discussions regarding the transition between first and second-cycle programmes emerged in all countries, although the character of these discussions differs between binary and unitary structures.

SCHE is seen as a way to expand or widen access in a number of countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK). Another way to achieve that goal is by recognition of prior experience.

Recognising prior experience generally refers to acknowledging one's past professional experience in order to (1) enable him or her to enrol at a higher education programme or (2) to receive credits or full degrees[28]. In France, for instance, the *'Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience'* (VAE), which is the second type of recognition, is on the rise. In Portugal, on the contrary, it is the first kind of recognition that plays a central role. Although the issue is still in its infancy, the Portuguese ministry is proposing a policy to validate prior learning and professional skills in the form of credits, which should enable persons lacking the necessary certificates to continue education at secondary and tertiary levels. The Dutch *'Erkennen van Verworven Competenties'* (EVC), is increasingly used as an instrument to involve those who are already in the workforce, or are unemployed, in life-long learning. A committee of the Finnish Ministry of Education is encouraging universities to improve life-long learning at universities, by developing specific strategies, developing the Open University path in student admissions and improving the continuing education opportunities of people with an academic education. The Committee also suggests that university-level continuing education could be privatised at the university's discretion.

Expanding access is not a goal on its own. It is seen by a number of governments as a way to increase the number of knowledge workers, one of the main goals in the Lisbon process. However, increasing access is only one side of the coin; the other side is to increase completion rates and to produce graduates more efficiently by shortening time to degree. The former pops up in Dutch policy, whereas the latter[29] is on the agenda in Finland and Germany.

Lisbon is not only about 'producing' more higher education graduates; it is also about taking advantage of the diversity in degree structure in European higher education systems. With the further development of the knowledge society, demand for knowledge workers will increase and diversify, calling for a wider variety of graduates. One aspect of that diversity that is getting most attention is the strive for more excellence. In a number of countries there was the common notion that all publicly provided higher education was of equal high quality and that differences between institutions regarding their quality of teaching were insignificant. This was/is the case in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Flanders. The last few years, this notion is losing ground: there are debates and policies to create or expand excellence programmes (like honours programmes in the Netherlands, or the creation of an *'Excellenz-Universität'* in Austria) and higher education institutions are getting more autonomy in selecting excellent students for their programmes (in Australia, UK, Sweden and the Netherlands).

[28] In certain cases (e.g. in Flanders), it can refer to secondary professional education, and can resolve in offering professional qualification titles (e.g. 'hairdresser')

[29] The introduction of SCHE may, on the macro level, contribute to shortening the time to degree.

12.2.2 Research

The Lisbon strategy also has a distinctive focus on 'excellence' regarding R&D, as a means to increase Europe's competitiveness. A recent report by a European Commission-appointed expert group also stresses the importance of investing money in excellent research.[30] There are several examples of this focus on excellence in the countries discussed in this report. On the one hand there are initiatives to create or enhance project-based targeted funding of research activities, often channelled through research councils. This can be seen in Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the UK. On the other hand, there is an ongoing trend towards concentration of research activities in 'centers of excellence'-type constructions (France, Flanders, and Sweden)

12.2.3 Finance

Also in 2005, financial instruments have been at the forefront of policy debates and legislative actions in the countries addressed here. Two key issues still remain particularly important: students' financial responsibility and the use institutions make of the resources they receive.

Student oriented instruments: fees and student support

The trend of increasing students' individual financial responsibility, for example by introducing (or increasing) tuition fees, continues in most countries, even though Scandinavia still represents an exception. In 2005 more attention has been paid to the effects of such reforms on access to higher education.

In Germany, the discussion on the introduction of generic fees got a new impulse through the Constitutional Court's ruling which confirmed the legitimacy of introducing fees by the States. Different state fee policies have created the issue of students moving from a State where fees are present to a State where higher education is still free. A relatively new item regarding tuition fees is the introduction of differentiated fees; in the Netherlands experiments have been started that allow institutions to charge higher fees for specific programmes and in England a complete system has been set up to regulate differentiated fees and equal access. Whether this financial aspect of the strive towards more diversity and excellence will emerge in other countries remains to be seen.

Institutional funding

Research funding

As mentioned above, there is a growing focus on stimulating 'excellent' research. This is done either through increasing the amount of project-based research funding (see above) or

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[30] Creating an Innovative Europe—Report of the Independent Expert Group on R&D and Innovation appointed following the Hampton Court Summit, January 2006, available at ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/era/docs/ieg_rtd_inno_0106.pdf, accessed 1/31/2006

through a stronger performance orientation in the funding formulas. The latter can be witnessed in Australia and the Netherlands, as well as in the UK, where performance has always been a key driver of funding.

Funding of teaching

In three countries there have been discussions or policy initiatives to change the funding of teaching activities. In the Netherlands the government has taken the initiative to introduce learning entitlements and in Portugal and Flanders, there are discussions how to change the funding formula into a more performance oriented mechanism. Whether these initiatives will have an effect on the diversity of teaching in terms of quality and excellence is unclear.

12.2.4 Quality assurance/ accreditation

Although the Bergen papers emphasised that QA is an important instrument to increase transparency, it is hardly mentioned in the case descriptions. The Bergen Communiqué, however, also states that 'almost all countries have made provision for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking'[31], and the 'Bologna Process Stocktaking Report' shows that most countries have followed up on QA and accreditation. Hence, most measures have been or are being implemented, although progress must still be made in terms of student involvement and international cooperation[32].

12.2.5 Governance

The starting point of this last chapter was the relation between the EU (the supra-national level) and the national governments. The EU is using non-coercive instruments to 'persuade' or 'invite' national governments to develop and implement certain policies. The core element of this Open Method of Co-ordination is peer learning. Countries should learn what policy instruments are effective or not from the experiences of other countries, especially from those that are identified as 'best practice' countries. So far, this process has not produced significant results in terms of insights in most effective policy instruments, simply because the peer learning processes have just been started up.

Before we turn to the national level and the relation between government and higher education institutions, it is time for an intermezzo: the relation between levels of government in federal states. There are two federal states[33] among the ten countries in our sample and in both systems there are tensions arising from the federal-state controversy. In Germany this may have a major impact on the future diversity of the German higher education system: there

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[31] The European Higher Education Area -Achieving the Goals: Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen 19-20 May 2005

[32] Ibid.

[33] The UK system may be seen as a 'federal' system in terms of educational policy, but because of the full autonomy of the countries, there is no 'federal' level.

is a move towards less federal and more state foreseen, which will drive the system to a higher level of (state-based) diversity. In Australia there seems to be a push in the opposite direction. Universities are frustrated by the different contexts the state regulations have created which lead to competitive disadvantages and 'un-equal' playing fields.
The relations between government and institutions have changed over the last decade in all countries, the trends being towards more institutional autonomy. Consequence of this trend is that institutions are held more accountable for their activities. Institutions (were and) are confronted with more requirements to show (very often in a quantitative way) what they have done with public money. In 2005 this is experienced in almost all countries:
Australia: institutions have to show the quality of their performance in research
Austria: the introduction of the *Wissensbilanz*
France: with the new financial law (LOLF) institutions are required to write annual performance reports
Germany: the creation of a center (the *Institut für Forschungsinformation und Qualitätssicherung*; IFQ) to monitor the research performance of higher education institutions
Netherlands: the Ministry publishes institutional performance tables
Portugal: discussions on performance related funding
UK: the OFFA regulations require detailed information from institutions and the proposals regarding the new research funding require more institutional accountability

These 'evidence-based' elements are gaining influence in the relation between government and institutions. A similar process may also be seen in the relations between institutions. The enhancement of institutional autonomy, 'combined' with trends towards internationalisation and market orientation have increased the need for institutions to position themselves amidst other higher education institutions (nationally and internationally). Although international rankings are still very limited in number and scope, they seem to have a serious impact on national discussions. Even though there is a consensus that such tables are methodologically far from sound, they have pushed the national discussions on the role of such positioning indicators in higher education policy making into a higher gear.

Whether the trends and processes discussed above would have happened the way they did without Bologna or Lisbon is impossible to answer, but it is clear that they have created (or used) a momentum that speeded up these developments in a way that was inconceivable in the period before.

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