

Reforms in Dutch Higher Education: The National Debate

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The Netherlands is positioning itself as an enthusiastic adopter of the Bologna Declaration. This European-wide initiative aims to increase the employability of European citizens and the international competitiveness of European higher education, by adopting a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (undergraduate and graduate) and by establishing stronger cooperation in the area of recognition and quality assurance. Besides countries that had already implemented these types of reforms prior to the Bologna Declaration (e.g., Italy and Germany), the Netherlands is one of the first countries to do so after its signing in 1999.

Reform Initiatives

Two major reforms are planned for 2002 to position Dutch higher education better internationally: the implementation of a bachelor's-master's system and the establishment of a national accreditation system. The bachelor's-master's system applies to both sectors of Dutch higher education: universities and higher professional education institutions. The bachelor's phase will take three years in universities and four in the professional sector. The length of the master's phase depends on the field of study. In universities, the master's phase will take one year for humanities, social sciences, and law; two years for science and engineering; and three years for some medical fields. These choices are based on the current length of curricula in both sectors. Master's programs in the professional institutions are, in formal terms, a new feature and may last one to two years. There will be professional and traditional academic types of bachelor's and master's programs. The distinction between these types of programs will not be based on the type of institution offering them, but on their diverse content and orientation, which will be reflected in different accreditation criteria.

The universities became defensive during discussions about the master's phase. First, they argued against allowing higher professional education institutions to be formally entitled to award master's degrees, even of the academic or university type, provided they meet the accreditation criteria set for these programs. Master's programs in this sector will, however, not be funded, which led to protests from the professional institutions demanding a level playing field. Second, the universities disputed the one-year duration of master's level studies in the humanities, social sciences, and law and the fact that the extension of these programs to two years would have to be paid by the institutions them-

selves. Third, the universities formally disagreed with the minister's proposal to develop internationally competitive "top master's programs," that would be allowed to select their students and raise tuition fees as much as fivefold. In addition, student organizations and Parliament protested strongly against this new type of program, on the basis of arguments related to long-standing and culturally rooted principles of equal access to higher education. Despite all these protests, the plans did not change much, except that longer master's programs in universities and certain master's programs in the professional sector may be funded in case the need for that is convincingly demonstrated.

CHEPS Survey Results

A recent survey by CHEPS on the implementation of the bachelor's-master's system revealed a number of issues and problems. In general, the institutions have responded very proactively. At the institutional level, however, most attention has been focused on the master's level. An overwhelming number of proposals for master's programs are being developed, more often based on research priorities than on any actual demand analysis. This holds the risk that, as in certain research universities in the United States, undergraduate teaching may suffer. Discussions on the new structure hardly take the links with prior (secondary education) and subsequent (doctorate) education into account. Universities are very resistant to the idea that students may leave the institution, at least temporarily, after having obtained a bachelor's degree. Therefore, all efforts will be focused on motivating students to continue with their graduate studies without interruption.

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The notion of a more diversified graduate population, including more mature students, largely still needs to be developed. The academic drift of the professional sector, in terms of developing academic, research-related programs, seems to be quite limited so far. Moreover, in these ambitions the professional sector continues to lean quite heavily on cooperation with foreign universities. The professional drift of universities is indistinct. Ambitions to offer programs leading to professional degrees are mostly

denied, although such programs are of course offered in the traditional professional areas (e.g., law) and quite a few new ones have been developed over the last years in areas such as business studies. It is unclear to what extent this situation results from definition problems or from the defensive attitude toward the professional sector. Finally, the CHEPS survey showed that, despite their overt critiques, almost all universities intend to offer the so-called top master's programs.

National Accreditation

The new accreditation system will accredit programs based on different sets of criteria for bachelor's and master's programs of a professional and an academic nature. Since these do not include the type of institutions offering the program, this may lead to a shift from institutional to program diversity. Responses to the blurring of institutional borders are twofold: on the one hand are universities that judge the discussion as mostly immaterial and who would con-

sider mergers with an institution for higher professional education (which will be allowed under the new regulations). On the other hand are universities that hold strongly to their particular status and research profile. Programs will be reviewed every five years by independent review committees. Their report will be the basis on which the National Accreditation Agency will make the actual accreditation decision.

Although accreditation criteria should be based on international standards, programs offered by foreign providers will be included, and foreign accrediting organizations may provide their services in the new system. The new system is also being criticized for a lack of an international orientation. This refers to the fact that it is a *national* system, whereas European-level accreditation initiatives are more desirable in the eyes of some critics. The Dutch strategy, however, is to use this national system as a basis to achieve bi- or even multilateral cooperation in a bottom-up manner. This is just as the Netherlands likes to see itself: as a pioneer in European cooperation. ■

Adaptation and Change in Russian Universities

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Russian universities have experienced severe financial conditions over the past decade. Higher education expenditures, adjusted for inflation, have declined from an index value of 100 in 1992 to 27.9 in 1998. Yet during this same period, enrollments in the Russian Federation have increased 21 percent. How have Russian universities adapted to such dramatic financial constriction?

Two colleagues and I undertook case studies of three Russian universities in order to study adaptation under these conditions. All three institutions are located in Kazan, the capital city of the Republic of Tatarstan, located about 500 miles east of Moscow. Kazan State University (KSU) is a prestigious classical university of about 12,000 students in the top strata of Russian universities. Kazan State Technical University (KSTU) was a former aircraft industry-related technical institute that has recently transformed itself into a broader technical university. The Tatar Institute for Business Promotion (TISBI) is a relatively new private, for-profit institution that has achieved full accreditation and an enrollment of about 1,800.

Entrepreneurial Efforts to Shift Revenues

Consistent with institutions around the world, the two public universities here have had to be aggressive in seeking nongovernmental revenue sources. KSU and KSTU have both moved from almost 100 percent government funding

a decade ago to around 53 percent government funding today. Tuition and fees now constitute about 20 percent at each institution. Contract research with various industries are now about 9 percent at KSU and 18 percent at KSTU. Foreign foundation funding and other philanthropic sources now constitute over 8 percent at KSU.

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Dramatic shifts have therefore occurred in funding sources. Even with such entrepreneurship, the level of resources available has declined significantly in terms of inflation-adjusted rubles. This has meant that the two public universities are surviving by paying faculty and staff less relative to historical levels of compensation and relative to other professions now. Yet faculty attrition is relatively low and the institutions have not cut programs nor eliminated jobs in other ways as means of coping. As is the case all over Eastern Europe and Russia, faculty survive by holding multiple jobs, which has allowed TISBI and other private institutions to develop by hiring faculty at marginal, part-time rates.