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COMPARING ADAPTATIONS
OF EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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Preliminary remarks and acknowledgements

This study was written in the context of my work at the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHE) in Germany and academically supervised at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente (CHEPS).

The CHE is a non-profit think tank and consultancy in higher education (HE) reform jointly set up by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the German rectors' conference (HRK). That this thesis was undertaken as a CHE project marks the Centre's acknowledgement of the growing importance of European developments in general, and the Bologna process in particular, for the future of German HE.

Researching and writing this dissertation was a great personal experience which allowed me to witness a historical process in the making: the emergence of the European HE area. The more so, as I had studied in three of the four countries included in this project, Germany, the Netherlands, and England, and have been a Francophile for a long time. I felt fortunate to have the opportunity to explore the cultures and politics of these four HE systems in depth. The intercultural 'translation' exercise involved in this project was among what I enjoyed most.

Writing a 'work-based' doctoral thesis in the context of international cooperation between two European HE research and reform centres was an inspiring as well as a challenging experience. It was inspiring as I never suffered from the question facing so many other doctoral students: what this study will be good for. I am convinced that I could not have as comprehensively understood the intricacies of higher education reform without the benefit of always being in touch with the relevant audience and field of application. While I enjoyed the change between academia and policy advice implied in this set-up, combining the demands of the job and the thesis was a balancing act. Looking back, the opportunity to explore the body of European HE research and to grow into the community of researchers, as well as develop an understanding of four diverse HE systems, has been a highly rewarding experience that I would not want to have missed.

I owe a lot to many people without whom this study would not have been possible. First of all, I would like to thank Detlef Müller-Böling, the Director of CHE, for granting me the needed freedom to pursue these questions in an academic, thorough, and self-guided way, as well as my academic supervisors Marijk van der Wende and Jeroen Huisman at CHEPS for the unique mixture of confidence, challenge, and pragmatism which complemented my abilities in a fruitful way. I would like to especially thank Jeroen for continuing to supervise the thesis after moving to the University of Bath in England to become Director of the International Centre for Higher Education Management (ICHEM) in 2005.

A big thank you goes to the more than 95 interviewees from Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England; it is only through their cooperation that I was

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"Whilst the cross national dimension has over the past four decades or so gathered both momentum and scholarly weight, it remains true, by and large, that the analysis of developments in higher education tends to remain bounded by national context and illuminated by national exception. Even so, few would deny that keeping a weather eye open for how one's neighbours—and possible competitors are dealing—or failing to deal with—issues broadly similar to those with which we are struggling, has become a natural concomitant to knowing what is happening in our own parish."

Neave (2001a: 272).

1 Introduction

While European integration has been progressing continuously during the last decades in many areas, most notably the economic sphere, education policy has, for a long time, largely remained the domain of nation states. European national governments decidedly and successfully defended their education systems against influence from the European Union, as well as against any attempt at 'harmonisation', as expressed in Article 126 (149) of the Maastricht (Amsterdam) treaty. Against this backdrop, the so-called 'Sorbonne declaration' was a historic step. In May 1998 Claude Allègre, the French minister in charge of higher education (HE), invited his colleagues from Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom to Paris to sign a joint declaration on what they called "harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system" (Sorbonne declaration, 1998). They explicitly did so outside of any European Union context. What they did not know at the time is that they would trigger a set of far-reaching reforms of European HE systems that have become known as the 'Bologna process'. Already a year later in June 1999, as many as 29 European ministers in charge of HE had subscribed to similar aims. They signed the 'Bologna declaration', expressing their intention to build a "European area of higher education" and to achieve "greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education" in order to "promote citizens' mobility and employability" and increase "the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education" vis-à-vis the rest of the world (Bologna declaration, 1999). By 2006, 45 European countries inside and outside of the European Union (EU) have joined the process and reforms are underway all over Europe that include the restructuring of HE systems in this context.

1.1   Research topic

At the heart of many of these reforms is the objective expressed in the second of six so-called 'action lines' of the Bologna declaration, the "adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate" (ibid). The translation of this objective into national policy formulation constitutes the research topic of this study.

Historically, European HE systems have shown a wide variety in terms of degree structures, but a two-cycle system was novel to most of them. As I will show, for those European countries that had not previously structured their degree programmes in two consecutive cycles, the move to such a structure triggered debates about fundamental changes in their HE systems. These debates reached far beyond the formal change of degree length, titles, and types, and extended to many of the respective HE systems' tangible and intangible aspects. But the developments were also relevant for the few European HE systems that traditionally had national degree structures organised in two main cycles and were faced with the question of the "compatibility and comparability" (Bologna declaration, 1999) of their degrees with other countries in new ways.

To compare degree structures across national HE systems, it is not sufficient to look only at the length, titles, and types of degrees. They have to be understood in a wider context, such as which types of higher education institutions (HEIs) grant them, which percentage of an age group attains the particular degree, which curricular goals are attached to them, and which opportunities in the labour market they open up. These and other issues are likely to come into play in the course of a reform of national degree structures. This study will therefore analyse the adaptations of national degree structures with a view to their potential for wider changes in European HE systems.[1]

In a great number of signatory countries, reforms are currently underway to adapt national degree structures to a two-cycle system. In many but not all European countries, this system is referred to as 'Bachelor and Masters'[2] following the Anglo-Saxon example. Other terms used are 'undergraduate and graduate studies', 'first and second degree', and 'two-tier' structure. Differences

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[1]   In a recent paper, Musselin (2005) argues that different from previous reforms of European HE systems that were based on convergent trends but that in fact reinforced diversity, the Bologna process aims at the convergence of the "'products and the production process' of the system rather than its design" (ibid: 2). In this thesis, I consciously opted for a perspective that differs from the formally stated aims of the Bologna process and includes the 'systemic' perspective in the picture of degree reform.

[2]   In Germany, the Netherlands, and France, the newly introduced Masters-level degrees are actually commonly referred to as "Master" degrees (without 's'). To achieve consistency throughout the text, I use the more common English word "Masters" unless a specific degree title is referred to, which is usually indicated by inverted commas. The use of terminology and spelling in verbatim quotes has also been left unchanged, and therefore varies.

in connotation notwithstanding, all these expressions are used interchangeably in this study to denote the same thing. I mostly use the terms 'two-cycle degree structures' and 'undergraduate and graduate studies' following the terminology of the Bologna documents. I also speak more generally of 'adaptations of national degree structures' to include the English situation which did not necessitate the introduction of a new degree structure. I speak of 'national degree structures' to clarify that I refer to changes in national systems rather than individual higher education institutions (HEIs).

In the meantime, the aim formulated in this action line has been extended to explicitly include the doctoral level as a third cycle (Berlin Communiqué, 2003) which, in the Bologna declaration was still lumped together with the Masters level as a second cycle. While acknowledging the importance of this development, this work focuses on HE up to the Masters level.

The role of the Bologna process for the reforms of degree structures that are underway across Europe is somewhat debated. Admittedly, they cannot always be attributed exclusively to the Bologna process. In some countries they were initiated prior to the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations. The latter could therefore also be seen as a formalised expression of a general political will and trend that existed anyway. In the words of the authors of the European University Association's (EUA) second 'trends report', the Bologna process

> is mostly seen as confirming/reinforcing national priorities. […] The process' biggest strength […] [is that] it 'crystallises' major trends and reveals that issues and solutions have a European dimension; as a consequence the process is not (or no longer) seen as an intrusion, but as a source of information on the most suitable way forward for Europe (Haug & Tauch, 2001: 5).

In a different vein, Neave interprets the Bologna process as an "act of appropriation", in the course of which credentials are claimed for a number of trends that have not been created by it but just bundled under its label:

> It is built upon—and brings together—trends already present in different systems and presents them as part of the Bologna process. It does not create them. From a political perspective, this is useful indeed. By bringing existing developments, or those moving towards the implementation stage at the national level, under the shadow of Bologna's wing, it is possible to impart an unprecedented sense of achievement, apparent consensus and agreement, all in a miraculously short space of time. However, from the standpoint of the policy analyst, and very certainly the methodology buff, it is exceedingly difficult to draw a distinction between those lines of policy the origins of which are prior to Bologna and those which Bologna might reasonably claim to have initiated (Neave, 2002:186-187).

However one may look upon these observations, it is beyond doubt that since the Bologna declaration, a great deal of reform in European HE is focused and coordinated in the framework of the Bologna process, by which the aims of the declaration are implemented. Therefore, the adaptation of national degree structures will be regarded in the context of this process.

While the term 'convergence' is not mentioned in the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations[3], it is clearly the declarations' and the ensuing Bologna process' leitmotiv. The degree of convergence and the dimensions to which it shall extend however, go largely unspecified. Regarding the adoption of a system of two cycles, it is stated only that the first cycle should last "a minimum of three years", should be "relevant to the European labour market", and that "the second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries" (Bologna declaration, 1999). At the same time, in line with previous European education policy documents, the Bologna declaration confirms the intention to "take full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of university autonomy" (Bologna declaration, 1999; see also De Wit & Verhoeven, 2001; Verbruggen, 2002). It has to be kept in mind that the Bologna declaration is not a binding legal contract or policy agreement, but a declaration of intent of the European ministers in charge of HE. It has been deliberately agreed upon *outside* of the framework of the European Union (EU)[4]— though the ensuing process becomes increasingly interwoven with EU-processes and procedures (see Verbruggen, 2002). For its translation into national policies, and eventual changes in individual HE systems, the declaration is therefore largely dependent on what happens in the signatory countries, i.e., at the national level. Finally, there is broad consensus among HE researchers that strong underlying forces push towards diversification of European HE systems (Huisman, 1995; Teichler, 2003), among them expanding student enrolment (Trow, 1974), increasing academic specialisation (Kogan, 1997), growing needs of the knowledge society, intensifying globalisation in HE, and increasing competition between HEIs (Van der Wende, 2001). In sum, the Bologna effort stands against a range of opposing pressures towards diversification. This study investigates how the resulting tension between convergence and diversity (see Meek, Goedegebuure, Kivinen, & Rinnen, 1996; Teichler, 1988c) plays out when it comes to translating the Bologna declaration into national policies.[5]

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[3]   As highlighted above, the Sorbonne declaration instead speaks of "harmonisation".

[4]   It should be kept in mind that European-level events in the context of the Bologna process cannot be equated with EU events, and that terms like 'Europe' or 'European level' are generally used without particular reference to the European Union.

[5]   As highlighted by Jordan (1995: 3 referring to Hoffmann, 1966: 881), the tension between the "logic of integration" and the "logic of diversity" is a common theme in the study of EU politics, and is in no way confined to HE.

1.2   Starting point and personal research interest

That the translation of the Bologna goal of a two-cycle degree structure into national policies is an interesting and highly relevant issue became clear to me when I undertook a comparative study of the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes in Germany and the Netherlands. In 2000, CHEPS had undertaken a survey of Dutch HEIs' management aims with the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes as well as the actual state of implementation at that point in time (Van der Wende & Lub, 2001). CHEPS and the CHE were subsequently commissioned by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to conduct a similar study in Germany, on which I had the lead for the CHE (Klemperer, Van der Wende, & Witte, 2002). When I translated the Dutch questionnaire to the German situation, it quickly emerged that the entire policy context including the related discourses, the motives of institutional management, and the conditions for implementing two-cycle degree structures varied greatly between the countries (Lub, Van der Wende, & Witte, 2003). While the new degree structures were officially introduced in both countries under an internationalisation or Europeanisation agenda, a range of different motives existed in each country for its engagement in the Bologna process and the introduction of the two-cycle degree structure in particular. Apparently, the reform was being used by various actors in national HE policy as a vehicle to pursue their interests and bring about change in dimensions of HE systems that were at first glance not immediately linked to the introduction of two-cycle degree structures. For example, both the German *Fachhochschulen* and the Dutch *hogescholen* saw the introduction of two-cycle degree structures as a vehicle to upgrade their status vis-à-vis the universities, but the way their interests were played out in the policy process differed between the two countries. While the German government hoped to be able to use the introduction of two-cycle degree structures to improve teaching quality and shorten the length of studies, a dominant concern of the Dutch government was the international perception of Dutch degrees. These and other motivations played an important role in the way two-cycle degree structures took shape in Germany and the Netherlands, and seemed to go a long way in accounting for differences in implementation patterns. I therefore became interested in moving beyond the diplomatically motivated policy discourse of the Bologna process to the real motives and driving forces that made countries—and actors within them—engage in the process. I expected these motives and their relative importance to vary in other countries as well, depending on what was perceived as critical issues by the respective actors in the systems.

It also occurred to me that the inherited patterns of the respective HE system—including both structural and cultural aspects—constituted another important factor shaping the emerging patterns of two-cycle degree structures. For example, in the Netherlands the traditional Masters-level degree from

universities—the *doctorandus*—had an official length of four years in most subject areas, and awareness that adding an extra year would require additional public funding was high. This starting point seemed to largely account for the fact that the new Masters degree was also constituted after four years in most subjects—in spite of the 'emerging consensus' at the European level that a Masters degree should be granted after the equivalent of five years of full-time study (see for example Haug, Kirstein, & Knudsen, 1999; Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). In Germany by contrast, where real study time greatly exceeded the scheduled length of study programmes anyway and the relationship between HE funding and cost per student was quite blurred, the increase of the previous scheduled study length of four-and-a-half years for most study subjects to five years total for a Bachelor and Masters programme in sequence was not an issue. Instead, what was discussed early on as a means for shortening real study length was that the majority of students would have to leave HE to enter the labour market with a Bachelor.

Cultural and historical arguments seemed to feature particularly strong in the German debate around the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes. While it was not always easy to separate pretext from true reasons, a common argument of opponents was that the imposition of an 'Anglo-Saxon model' was incompatible with the Humboldtian idea of 'unity of research and teaching'. Against this background, I was curious to find out more about the peculiar cultural 'colouring' of the national debates on two-cycle degree structures in other countries. This interest was based on the conviction that if we are to build a 'European area of higher education' as stipulated in the Bologna declaration, it will require a mutual understanding of the respective educational values, traditions, and role models. The European Commission holds a similar view, which is why it spends a considerable part of its HE budget on strengthening the 'European dimension' (see Verbruggen, 2002). As Neave (2002: 187) puts it, it is wrong to

> equate similar structures, the emergence of similar provision, as evidence of convergence. [...] We do not know in a systematic and objective manner how far that consensus around mobility, employability and competitiveness penetrates into the fabric of higher education.

To recapitulate my inferences from the Dutch-German study, I expected the inherited contexts—structural, political, cultural—of the HE systems taking part in the Bologna declaration to vary as much as the motives and interests of actors within these systems. If this was the case, then the envisaged convergence of national degree structures in the course of the Bologna process was not at all self-evident. An analysis of the different starting points of a number of selected HE systems and the motives of the major actors in HE policy in these systems could

then help create a realistic and unbiased basis for judgement about the chances for convergence.

The DAAD-sponsored study on the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes in Germany and the Netherlands thus effectively functioned as an exploratory study that generated my initial research questions and suggested a particular line of sight in how to go about answering them. This served as the starting point for the quest for an adequate theoretical framework to investigate the introduction of two-cycle degree structures more systematically and in a broader range of European countries. The initial research questions can be formulated as follows:

Box 1.1: Research questions

RQ1.	How are the national degree structures adapted in the context of the Bologna process and what changes does this imply for other relevant dimensions of the respective HE systems?
RQ2.	What explains the nature and degree of change in the respective HE systems and the similarities and differences between them?
RQ3.	Do the adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process contribute to the convergence of the respective HE systems?

1.3   Research approach

To compare and analyse adaptations in European HE systems in the context of the Bologna process as specified in the initial research questions, I opted for a new institutionalist perspective of policy change and developed an analytical framework drawing on elements of Douglass North's (1990) model of institutional change,[6] the perspective of actor-centred institutionalism developed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf (1995; Scharpf 1997), and concepts from HE research.

Methodologically, I chose an international comparative design with case studies covering the adaptations of national degree structures and concomitant

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[6]   The term 'institution' is used in this study in two different ways. First, in the traditional or colloquial sense, i.e., to denote organisations such as higher education institutions for example; second, in the new institutionalist sense, i.e., to denote "the rules of the game". To prevent confusion, I will use the abbreviation "HEIs" for higher education institutions throughout the text and avoid using the term 'institution' in the colloquial sense wherever possible (see chapters 2.4 and 3.1). When I speak of 'institutional change' in HE, I thus do not refer to the change of individual HEIs but to changes in the HE system as a whole, i.e., institution in the new institutionalist sense.

changes in the HE systems of France, England, Germany, and the Netherlands in the period between 1998 and 2004. The focus of the case studies is on national-level policy formulation.

This study maps and analyses the nature and degree of change in the respective HE systems as well as the observed differences across systems. It also investigates to what extent adaptations of national degree structures contribute to the convergence of European HE systems. I analyse how the inherited national degree structures embedded in the institutional context of the respective HE systems are changed by major actors[7] in national HE policy and their interaction in the policy formulation process. I do so by considering key structural and cultural features of the respective HE systems that constitute the divergent starting points for national policy formulation processes; following North, I refer to them as formal and informal constrains. I then show how they influence actors' capabilities, preferences, and perceptions and their interaction in the process, drawing on these concepts from Scharpf.

To account for the contextual approach, seven dimensions of HE systems receive particular attention. In addition to national degree structures, they include: institutional diversity, curricular governance, curricula, access, transition to employment, and funding.

The theoretical choices and key concepts will be explained in chapters 2 and 3 and the methodological approach in chapter 4.

1.4 Relevance to research and practice

This study seeks to contribute to research and practice in three major ways: by (1) making a relevant contribution to comparative HE research theoretically and empirically; (2) by putting forward a framework for the study of policy change in the HE sector; and (3) by improving our knowledge base for the construction of a European HE area.

CONTRIBUTION TO COMPARATIVE HE RESEARCH. Since its emergence as a sub-discipline in the 1970s, international comparative HE researchers have studied the commonalities and differences between European HE systems and grappled with the question of convergence (Goedegebuure & Van Vught, 1994; Meek et al., 1996; Teichler, 1988c, 1990). In his 1990 study for the European Council, Teichler found

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[7] The term 'actor' is generally used in this study to refer to what have been called 'composite' or 'organisational' actors in the literature—encompassing 'aggregate', 'corporate', and 'collective' actors (Scharpf, 1997). According to Knoke (1990), 'actor' is a "generic term for a unitary social entity, whether an individual person or a larger collectivity, such as a corporation or a nation state". In network theories and actor-centered institutionalism, it is common to refer to organisations as actors (Knoke, 1990; Mayntz, 1997; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995b; Scharpf, 1997) (see chapter 3.2.2).

no clear pattern of convergence among HE structures; the picture he found was so complex that he could not even develop a common framework for their categorisation,. Against this background, the declared aim of the ministers in charge of HE whose countries participated in the Bologna process to make their national degree structures more similar, merits the attention of HE research. This study takes up many of the themes dealt with in the comparative HE literature, revisits them from a contemporary perspective, and puts forward an analytical framework for the comparison of key dimensions of HE systems. A lot of comparative research in the field of HE has so far considered national systems as closed and autonomous and compared how they respond to common trends; few studies have yet theoretically or empirically accounted for their increasing interrelatedness (Van der Wende, 2002). This study addresses this gap by looking at the way in which the European agenda and developments feature in national actors' preferences and perceptions and tracing the particular dynamics deriving from the interplay of national and international levels. By doing so, it contributed to track two of the CHEPS research agenda 2001-2005, "new architecture, new co-ordination" (CHEPS, 2000).

CONTRIBUTION TO POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH. Policy research has faced many challenges posed by the changing political reality and addressed them by successively reviewing and extending its theoretical thrust (Mayntz, 1998). Two of the more recent phenomena researchers in this field grapple with are how to adequately capture the complexities of the policy process in view of the failures of implementation theory (Sabatier, 1999a) and how to get an adequate theoretical grasp of multi-level policy making in the European context (Scharpf, 2000b). The Bologna process represents a theoretical challenge at both these frontiers: though inherently European, it takes place outside of the European Union on which most of the theorising on multi-level governance in Europe has so far focused. As an object of policy analysis, the Bologna process constitutes an extreme example of the difficulties encountered by policy analysts to a larger or lesser degree in the study of most contemporary policy fields. Goal ambiguity of initial policies, the blurring of phases, and the complexities of the policy process require a theoretical approach different from the phase models and top-down approaches of classical policy and implementation analysis (see DeLeon, 1999; Sabatier, 1999a). This study contributes to the quest for adequate theoretical approaches for policy analysis in the face of this new complexity, putting forward a framework tailored to the study of policy change in HE systems.

CONTRIBUTION TO HE REFORM. To HE policy makers and university managers across Europe, research-based insights into the Bologna process are highly relevant as the successive outcomes of this ongoing process provide the real context for reform decisions that each national HE system and each individual HEI within these systems has to take. In the absence of a predefined convergence point, let alone an entity that could enforce it, the overall outcome of the Bologna

process will emerge from what comes close to "uncoordinated action in an anarchic field" (Scharpf 1997, 2000b). This creates a chaotic and highly path-dependent dynamic in which the hazardously emerging "normative power of the facts"—or even worse, rumours about alleged facts—are likely to dominate any rationally founded reasoning (Pierson, 2000a, 2000c). In this situation, it is important for HE reformers to not only get an accurate and timely picture of the ongoing reforms in other European countries, but also to understand the underlying dynamics of the process and the factors that drive it. How can they make important policy decisions with a view to creating a European HE area if they do not know where other countries are moving? In this regard, my study seeks to complement the empirical accompaniment of the Bologna process by the EUA through a series of trends reports (Haug et al., 1999; Haug & Tauch, 2001; Reichert & Tauch, 2003, 2005; Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). These reports provide a concise overview of overall developments in the Bologna signatory countries with respect to the six action lines listed in the declaration (including reforms of national degree structures). However, the picture necessarily remains quite sketchy and does not include individual country analyses, due to the broad scale of reforms and the sheer number of the participants in the process. Also, the fact that the trend reports are commissioned by the European Commission as a direct contribution to advancing the Bologna process does not ease a critical analysis of the status quo but creates a tendency towards identifying convergence even if it is only superficial. As explained above, this study assumes that 'convergence' remains an empty concept unless the changes in national degree structures are regarded and understood in the context of their particular national embedding. A European HE area that deserves its name must build on a clear assessment and real understanding of the respective national HE systems, including their cultural heritage. This study aims to provide such an assessment for the four countries included in the sample, and generate an analytical framework that can afterwards be readily applied to other countries. In doing so, it seeks to provide a sound empirical basis for HE policy decisions regarding the European HE area.

1.5 Structure

The structure of the study is as follows. In chapter 2, I explain the analytical choices on the way towards a theoretical framework that I present in chapter 3. In chapter 4, I outline the methodological approach. Chapter 5 provides an analytical review of the Bologna process at the European level as an overall context for the ensuing national case studies. The remainder of the study is devoted to an empirical investigation into policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures in the course of the Bologna process two-cycle degree structure in a selected number of European HE systems. Chapters 6-9 attend to the national cases, i.e., France, Germany, the Netherlands, and England. An international

comparative analysis of the country-specific results is undertaken in chapter 10. In chapter 11, I review the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework. I conclude the thesis with reflections on the contribution of this study for research and practice, avenues for further research, and its policy implications. Both an English and a brief Dutch summary are included. The appendix presents empirical background material for the case studies.

2 Steps towards a theoretical framework

In this chapter, I explain my research focus and position my approach in the relevant literature, making and justifying key choices on the way towards the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3. Towards this end, I present five propositions and elaborate them in light of four main literature strands: HE research, implementation research, policy research, and new institutionalism.

2.1 Convergence: an elusive concept

PROPOSITION 1. Implicitly or explicitly, the Bologna declaration aims at the convergence of degree structures to ease mutual recognition and promote the mobility of students and graduates. To assess whether convergence has occured, degree structures, titles, and length of study need to be regarded in the context of further relevant dimensions of the respective national HE systems. In this study, I define convergence as the process of becoming more similar.

As pointed out in the introduction, though the term 'convergence' does not appear in the Bologna declaration, it is the undisputed leitmotif of the Bologna process. The Sorbonne declaration (1998) speaks of the "harmonisation of the architecture of the European HE system", a terminology that appeared to be too strong for consensus among the Bologna signatory countries. In the Bologna declaration, the aim has been reformulated as achieving "greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education". While it does not appear in the official texts, the terminology of 'convergence' entered the discourse early in the Bologna process. The very first trends report, which was prepared by the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences[8] and the Association of European Universities (CRE)[9] with financial support from the European Commission as a "background paper for the Bologna Forum in 18-19 June 1999", pursued the objective

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[8] Following the convention of the European University Association (EUA), I use 'rectors' conferences' as a generic term to cover the national organisations of vice chancellors, presidents, *Rektoren*, principals, and other heads of higher education institutions. Only in the case of the British organisation Universities UK, do I speak of 'vice chancellors' conference' to account for the different British use of the term 'rector'.

[9] These two organisations are the predecessors of the EUA, into which they merged in March 2001.

> to map main *areas of convergence and divergence* in the structure of the various systems and sub-systems of HE in Europe, to identify significant trends in Europe and in the global environment which may have an effect on these structures, and *to indicate possible ways towards greater convergence* and effectiveness in the future [emphasis added] (Haug, 1999: 5).

Similarly, the (former) CRE website (2003) reads:

> In the wake of the Sorbonne Declaration signed in May 1998 by a limited number of countries, the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 on the creation of a European space for higher education is a pledge taken by 29 countries to reform the structures of their own higher education system in such a way that *overall convergence* emerges from the process at the European level [emphasis added].

2.1.1 Defining convergence

Convergence is defined as "the act, degree, or a point of converging; concurrence of opinions, results etc." It is the opposite of divergence, "the act or result of diverging or the amount by which something diverges; the condition of being divergent" (Wordreference, 2003). The concepts of convergence and divergence have a *twofold* meaning, one denoting a process and the other denoting a state. In the discourse of the Bologna process however, the term 'convergence' is only used to denote the process and the other meaning of the term is disregarded. This is an important detail: there is far-reaching political consensus that HE systems should converge, but not about the endpoint of this movement (i.e., convergence as a state, or result). The popularity of the term 'convergence' hinges on the perception that it denotes a process only; while the term 'harmonisation' has been abandoned due to the perception that this would imply the standardisation of HE systems.[10] Aiming at 'convergence' is widely seen as compatible with the simultaneous upholding of 'diversity'—an agreed value of European HE—while 'harmonisation' is perceived as threatening this diversity. If convergence increases, diversity is reduced, but never eliminated unless full convergence is reached. The aim of convergence is thus semantically compatible with the maintenance of "diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and university autonomy" stressed in the Bologna declaration as a goal and value unto itself.

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[10] See Neave (1996: 28) for a similar perception.

In this study, I use convergence as commonly referred to in the context of the Bologna process: as a process. In line with Kerr (1983)[11], I define 'convergence' as the process of becoming more similar, thus approaching each other, and 'divergence' as the process of becoming more different from each other. As the common endpoint of the Bologna process, is not defined, convergence cannot be measured against a 'common standard' but only with respect to similarities between the different systems. When asking the research question "Do the adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process contribute to the convergence of the respective HE systems", I thus intend to investigate whether they render European HE systems more similar. The careful phrasing of "*contributing*" to convergence is meant to express an awareness of the multiple forces and factors that simultaneously influence this process.

2.1.2 Convergence of what?

To measure convergence, it is crucial to define "what converges", i.e., "what is the substance or topic under investigation" (Unger & Waarden, 1995: 4). Neave (Neave, 1996), referring to the famous grinning cat that confuses Alice in Wonderland, rightly points out that whether something is perceived to converge or diverge is largely a matter of perspective or level of analysis. There is a certain ambiguity about this question in the Bologna declaration (1999). According to the stated aims—"the creation of the European area of higher education", "greater compatibility and comparability of higher education", and "increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education"—the convergence of European HE *systems* in their entirety is aimed at, even the *creation* of a *common European HE system*. If one looks at the actual action lines agreed upon to achieve these aims however, they are largely confined to the teaching- and learning-side of HE: degree systems, measurement of student workload, student mobility, and curricular development. The governance side of HE, including questions of steering, management capacity, and funding, is largely bypassed, with the exception of quality assurance. Other features generally considered central to the characterisation and comparison of HE systems, for example the nature and regulation of access and the respective roles and relationship of university and non-university HEIs (Goedegebuure et al., 1993; Goedegebuure & Van Vught, 1994; Neave, 2001a; Teichler, 1988c, 1990), are not mentioned either. There are two possible explanations for this gap between aims and means. The first is that through the use of visionary terminology, the declaration evokes misleading connotations of a far greater ambition than are merited by its literal policy content. The second is that through the creation of

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[11] … in Unger & Waarden (1995: 3): "the tendency of societies to grow more alike, to develop similarities in structures, processes and performances".

comparable and compatible structures on the teaching and learning side, more encompassing changes of European HE systems shall—and can—be triggered. This study holds that the latter is the case i.e., that the Bologna process and adoption of a system of two cycles in particular, has the potential to change the architecture of European HE systems in an unprecedented and profound way. This is because national degree structures are closely linked to a number of key dimensions of the HE system as a whole so that these dimensions are likely to be touched upon and drawn into the change process when degree structures are reformed. When answering the question whether adaptations of national degree structures contribute to the convergence of European HE systems, this study considers national degree structures in the context of a range of relevant dimensions of the HE systems, the choice of which will be elaborated in section 3.3.[12]

2.1.3 Conflicting forces

Having defined the unit and level of analysis, the next step is to direct attention to the underlying forces that bring about convergence or divergence and understand the direction and interplay of their effects (Unger & Waarden, 1995). Clearly, the Bologna process points in the direction of convergence, but the starting points of the process are highly diverse education systems, and there are other forces exerting influence in different directions. There is a rich body of HE literature on diversity which can help conceptually clarify the conflicting forces underlying the process (Birnbaum, 1983; Huisman, 1995; Meek et al., 1996). Much of this literature deals with the diversity *within* HE systems, while I am interested in the degree of similarity or diversity *between* HE systems. However, an important lesson from this literature is that it highlights that modern national HE systems have a high degree of diversity (Meek et al., 1996). No matter how much formal uniformity and structure government creates in the definition of institutional types or in the definition of degrees, HE has to absorb and cater to a growing and

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[12] This approach is confirmed by Teichler (1988c). In the introduction to his study on "Convergence or growing variety: the changing organisation of studies" undertaken on behalf of the Council of Europe, he holds that "an analysis of the organisation of studies aiming to understand its various implications cannot simply observe patterns of course programmes, for example duration, intermediate examinations and possibilities of transfer as such, but must also cover a set of closely related subjects, such as different modes of access and admission, curricular emphasis and governance of the organisation of studies" (ibid: 7). In the first trends report, Haug (1999) assumes a similar approach. When trying to identify areas of convergence and divergence, he does not confine his analysis to degree structures, but includes aspects such as the different types of secondary education, access, fees, "the existence or not of subsystems of HE", and "the organisation of studies in terms of calendar, choice, frequency and type of examinations" (ibid: 5-6).

diverse student population (Trow, 1972), respond to multiple labour market needs and changing societal demands (Teichler, 1999a), and accommodate the progressing growth and differentiation of academic knowledge (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Clark, 1983). This renders HE messy and ambiguous regardless of how strong the efforts of government to impose systems and regulations (Clark, 1996). For the Bologna process, this constitutes a clear side condition implying that a future European framework will necessarily have to accommodate a great degree of diversity within systems and can never be less complex and messy than the participating HE systems are internally. It is also an important reminder that the focus of this study on national HE systems should never ignore diversity *within* systems.

2.1.4   Implications for this study

To take stock, the starting point of the Bologna process is a range of extremely diverse national HE systems. In the various studies on structures and patterns of European HE systems that Teichler conducted in the late 1980s (Teichler, 1988a, 1988c, 1988e; see also 1990), he did "not observe altogether a general trend towards convergence of structural and organisational aspects of studies and their context" across Europe (Teichler, 1988c: 170). In the first trends report conducted at the very beginning of the Bologna process, Haug (1999: 5) finds that "the overall picture of studies, curricula and degrees is indeed extremely complex and varied". Especially, "no significant convergence toward a 3-5-8 model [referring to the length of the first, second, and third cycle, respectively] was found." While there are both convergent and divergent trends within HE, these operate at different levels and with different strength so that no general underlying trend can be assumed in either direction. Against this backdrop, whether convergence or divergence will be the result of the Bologna process depends on both the relative weight of the general forces moving towards convergence or divergence in the period under investigation and the specific contribution of the adaptation of degree structures. The trends reports already identify the possibility that the Bologna process might lead to more instead of less diversity of degree titles, creating new obstacles and confusion (Haug, 1999: 19; Haug & Tauch, 2001: 8). This may be the case if different degree systems are introduced in different countries in the course of the Bologna process—either different varieties of two-cycle degree structures or yet different systems. Moreover, even if the introduced two-cycle degree structures are nominally identical as far as degree titles and study length are concerned, their meaning and value might still differ due to differences in the related dimensions of the respective HE systems such as institutional types, relationship towards the labour market etc. These dimensions are included as analytical dimensions in the study, and in the assessment of convergence (see section 3.3).

2.2   Implementation theory: lessons from experience

PROPOSITION 2. *Because the Bologna declaration is only a declaration of intent and not legally binding (Verbruggen, 2002), it would be inadequate to equate its translation into national policies, and change at the level of individual HEIs, with 'implementation' in the literal and classical sense (see Gornitzka, Kyvik, & Stensaker, 2002).*

For this reason, and due to the agreed weaknesses of classical implementation analysis (see below), I opt for a policy-analysis rather than an implementation-analysis framework for this study. This also implies a broad understanding of policy formulation that takes into account the interaction and feedback effects between the different phases. The first part of this section (2.2.1) will outline the argument for this choice.

In the second part (2.2.2), I show that selected concepts from implementation theory are nevertheless useful to locate my focus of analysis. In light of Windhoff-Héritier's (1980) heuristic, national-level policy formulation emerges as the crucial intermediary stage between the European-level aims of the Bologna declaration and local changes of degree structures within individual HEIs. The choice for this focus also implies that the ambition of this study is to capture the nature and degree of *policy* change by the introduction of two-cycle degree structures at the national level, not to determine the change that has been affected at the grassroots level, that is within HEIs,. My definition of policy change does however include the national implementation policy, i.e., the degree to which a decision on the transition to the adapted degree structures has actually been taken at national level and, related to that, the decision on the mode of implementation (see also methodological chapter, section 4.4.1.3).

2.2.1   No implementation in the classical sense

As my study is colloquially about the 'implementation' of two-cycle degree structures in different national HE systems, it is not far-fetched to assume that implementation analysis could provide a suitable framework for my analysis. But the term 'implementation' seems problematic as the Bologna declaration is not a binding statute and the national HE systems can in no way be seen as its obedient executioners. A review of the literature on implementation analysis confirms that it would indeed be difficult to regard the Bologna process as an 'implementation' problem and reveals the underlying reasons as symptomatic of more general problems of this approach with tackling the dynamics of contemporary policy processes. Lessons from implementation analysis can however serve to shed light on crucial features of the Bologna process and support my chosen research framework.

Implementation analysis can be regarded as a sub-discipline of policy research that focuses particularly on the implementation phase of the policy process.[13] The classical approach of implementation analysis was developed by Mazmanian & Sabatier (1981; 1983). It is based on a stages heuristic, i.e., the policy process is divided "into a series of stages—usually agenda setting, policy formulation and legitimisation, implementation, and evaluation"—in order to discuss relevant "factors affecting the process within each stage" (Sabatier, 1999a:6) and possibly identify the conditions for implementation success or failure. The approach received a lot of attention in HE research as Cerych & Sabatier (1986) conducted an influential study that evaluated the outcome of a number of ambitious reforms at various levels of the HE system in different European countries that had been initiated in the late 1960s/early 1970s and identified factors for their success or failure. In the course of applying the framework of implementation analysis in this and other studies, a number of weaknesses of this approach became apparent which subsequently led to the merging of this approach—or, depending on the perspective—its replacement by, a range of frameworks for the analysis of policy processes, many of which assume an actor-centred perspective (Gornitzka et al., 2002; Héritier, 1993; Sabatier, 1999b). Sabatier himself is one of the major contributors to both the criticism and the theoretical advancement in response to it (Sabatier, 1986, 1999b).[14] I will now briefly review the major criticisms and theoretical responses to it and reflect them in the light of the Bologna process.

NO CAUSAL MODEL. Critics maintain that while providing a useful research heuristic and organising device, the stage model as such does not provide a causal explanation of the implementation process and is of little explanatory value (DeLeon, 1999). Mazmanian & Sabatier (1981; 1983) and Cerych & Sabatier (1986) tried to remedy this weakness by identifying a list of possible causal factors to account for the success or failure of innovative policies, including the (1) clarity and consistency of legal/official objectives (+) and the degree of system change envisaged (-); (2) adequacy of the 'causal theory' underlying the reform (+), i.e., the assumptions about the causal processes by which the goals are to be attained; (3) appropriateness of policy tools and adequacy of financial resources provided

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[13] The term 'policy research' can be used broadly, i.e., embracing the entire policy process, or narrowly, focusing on the development/design phase of new policies (Mayntz, 1997). I use it in the broader sense. A close neighbour of 'policy research' is 'policy analysis'. In the Anglo-Saxon context 'policy research' is often associated with more applied consultancy-type research, while 'policy analysis' connotes the more theoretical and detached variant (Héritier, 1993; Majchrzak, 1984). In the Continental European debate, the connotations evoked by the terms 'research' and 'analysis' tend to be exactly opposite – 'research' is regarded as more a more theoretical enterprise and 'analysis' as more applied. My study has aspects of both and I will therefore not bother further with the semantics and use these terms interchangeably.

[14] Among others, he has developed the advocacy-coalitions framework for the analysis of policy processes (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999).

to implementing institutions (+); (4) degree of commitment to the objectives in implementing institutions and control over those (+); (5) degree of interest group and legislative support (+); and (6) changes in social and economic conditions after policy formulation (-).

However, reality has proven too diverse to be captured by a list of factors, and their effects work too often in unexpected directions. In HE, vague and ambitious policies were sometimes successful, even when badly funded (Kogan, 2003). While my study could attempt to test the explanatory value of Sabatier's six causal factors in the case of the Bologna declaration, it would still be prone to the following criticisms.

INADEQUACY OF TOP-DOWN PERSPECTIVE. A top-down perspective is inherent in the very aim of classical implementation analysis, namely to judge and explain implementation success or failure. To be able do so, actual policy outcomes at the 'bottom' need to be compared to the original political aims decided at the 'top'. If outcomes differ greatly from the stated intentions, implementation is judged a failure. The problem is that such a perspective is not only often at odds with the empirical realities of contemporary governance, but reflects an increasingly antiquated and inadequate understanding of it.

First, the political unit to which implementation analysis is applied is not always structured in the hierarchical way that the top-down approach implicitly assumes. This is the case for federal systems if the policy under investigation is issued at the national level; but even more so in political areas that involve the interaction of international and national levels, such as the Bologna process (see also section 2.3). Second, from a top-down perspective, any independent actor that engages in the implementation process constitutes a potential 'obstacle' to change even if the interaction of several political actors is needed to create ownership of a policy, and diversion from the original aims appears as a failure even if it reflects a necessary adaptation to local conditions.

Besides the fact that such a perspective reflects a questionable understanding of democracy, studies undertaken in this spirit programme their own result, which is the diagnosis of implementation failure (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Indeed, most implementation studies end up identifying reasons for 'why implementation fails' (Levine, 1980). This criticism has been most fervently advanced by the proponents of a 'bottom-up' approach to implementation.[15]

GOAL AMBIGUITY. Closely associated with the top-down perspective is the requirement of classical implementation analysis that political aims need to be clearly stated to serve as a benchmark for judging implementation success or failure. Many policies do not fulfil this criterion. The Bologna declaration—if regarded as a policy—is a case in point, characterised by ambiguous, multiple,

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[15] 'Bottom-uppers' reverse perspectives and take the interests and agendas of various actors at the 'grass-roots' level as the starting point of analysis (Hjern & Hull, 1982).

and partly contradictory goals. Sabatier (1986: 29) responded to this criticism by insisting that

> this does not, however, preclude the possibility for assessing program effectiveness. Instead, it simply means that effectiveness needs to be reconceptualised into the 'acceptability space' demarcated by the intersection of the ranges of acceptable values on each of the multiple evaluative dimensions involved.

He thus reframed the benchmark for implementation success instead of discarding the approach. While this certainly is a pragmatic way of circumventing the immediate problem, it does not address the underlying problem. In the Bologna declaration, the vagueness and ambiguity of goals is mostly an expression of the fact that the original 'policy' itself is already a negotiated outcome, with vagueness and ambiguity the price paid for reaching an agreement at all. The top-down approach ignores this background of how most policies come about in the first place; this leads directly to the last criticism.

BLURRING OF PHASES. It is often impossible to separate the phases of the policy process as clearly as suggested by the stages heuristic. In reality, the phases tend to be blurred. In the negotiations leading up to the Bologna declaration, national interests had already influenced the way the declaration was formulated and led to the vagueness and implied contradictions in the first place. As a consequence of the ambiguity, important aspects of policy formulation are deferred to what would normally be regarded the implementation phase, i.e., the interpretation of the Bologna declaration in different national contexts and its translation into different national policies. In their study, Cerych & Sabatier (1986: 11) themselves concluded that

> implementation should not be regarded simply as the application—successful or not—of a basic policy decision. It is also an evolutionary process in which both the formal goals and the structures and procedures for attaining them are subject to modification.

In light of this literature, the Bologna process appears as an extreme example for what has been repeatedly found to be the case in policy implementation studies and has largely led to the replacement of implementation theory with different approaches. It is most adequately conceptualised by "implementation as evolution" (the title of an article by Majone & Wildavsky, 1978) or, I would add, "implementation as interpretation"[16], as well as "implementation as vehicle for the pursuit of particular interests". The evaluation of goal attainment is therefore less interesting than an analysis of how adaptations of national degree structures

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[16]   Rogers (1995) speaks of "re-invention".

are shaped and coloured by the cultural, structural, and motivational contexts in the signatory states—which is what I set out to undertake. An implementation theorist could probably still regard my work as an 'illuminated' implementation study with the key variables affecting the implementation process being (1) the inherited formal and informal features of the respective HE system, and (2) the capabilities, preferences, and perceptions of major actors in HE policy. But ultimately, the question whether implementation analysis has *evolved* into policy process analysis or has been *replaced* by it is purely semantic, as long as the normative bias involved in the top-down perspective is abandoned (Dill & Friedman, 1979). The new approach is "multi-level", pays attention to "policy interaction", the "processes of formulating governmental policies" as well as "the different interests of institutions in higher education", and does not neglect "issues of power, interest and conflicts" as proposed by Gornitzka et al. (2002) in a recent review. In this sense, my study takes into account the lessons learned from a few decades of experience with implementation analysis in policy and HE research (Héritier, 1993).

In light of these considerations, I adopt a broad understanding of 'policy formulation'. In contrast to classical stage models which see policy formulation as one narrowly confined stage within the implementation process (see Sabatier, 1999a: 6, above), I make use of it as a transversal analytical category, looking at the interaction of actors in the formulation of national policies, the policies that are actually formulated—leading to policy change—as well as the feedback loops from implementation experience into the ongoing refinement of these policies. In my understanding, policy formulation and policy change are never complete but subject to continuous feedback loops.

2.2.2 National policy formulation as research focus

Notwithstanding the reservations put forward regarding the top-down perspective and keeping in mind the blurring of phases in reality, a classical stage model of the implementation process can nevertheless serve to point out the focus of my analysis on policy formulation at the national level.

This is done using an extension of Windhoff-Héritier's (1980) model of policy implementation to include the international dimension. Windhoff-Héritier defines implementation as "the phase in the policy process model which begins with a political decision and ends with the realisation of this decision" (ibid: 220). She distinguishes different phases of implementation and develops her own terminology, distinguishing policy outputs, outcomes and impacts. Here, I am only interested in a single aspect of her analysis: what is 'policy implementation' from the perspective of the 'higher' level at which policies have been formulated can in fact be regarded as another stage of 'policy formulation' at the respective 'lower' level. Policy formulation at each level results in policy change, which is

only translated into actual change once these policies are implemented within individual HEIs (see Theisens, 2004 for a similar distinction). While the original model is meant to depict policy implementation within a closed national framework, it lends itself to a demonstration of the *staged* translation of the Bologna declaration into actual change at the level of HEIs (Figure 2.1).

'Implementation' of the Bologna declaration is thus a tiered process: what is national-level policy *implementation* from the international viewpoint amounts to *policy formulation* from the national viewpoint. In turn, from the national viewpoint, implementation—and actual change—does not occur before two-cycle degree structures reach the level of HEIs. Even at that grassroots level, officially stated policies of institutional management need to be distinguished from what happens at the 'chalk face'. At each level, goals associated with the introduction of two-cycle degree structures are reformulated according to actors' motives and perceptions. A simple two-step stage model of policy formulation and adoption cannot capture these convolutions.

Within this complex process, policy formulation at the national level constitutes a particularly relevant research focus as it assumes a crucial intermediary position between the international dynamics of the Bologna process and the actual implementation of the new degree structures 'on the ground'; it is here that an equilibrium between bottom-up and top-down approaches (Sabatier, 1986) to policy analysis can be sought.

Figure 2.1: Staged translation of the Bologna declaration into actual change
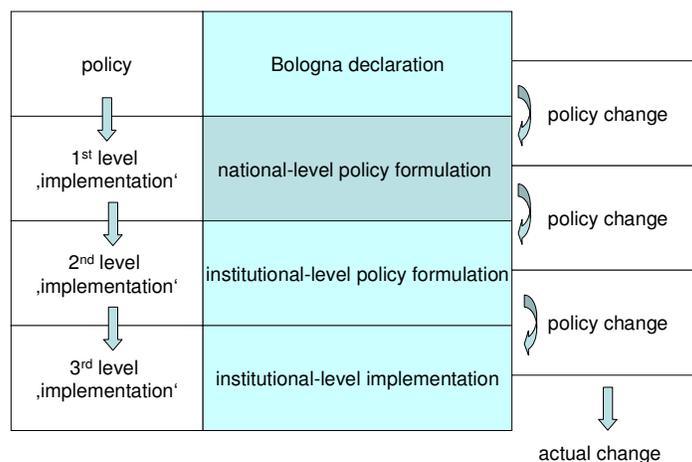
Adapted from: Windhoff-Héritier (1980: 5).

This study does not aim to evaluate the implementation of two-cycle degree structures at the level of individual HEIs or analyse the responses of individual HEIs to the Bologna process for theoretical as well as practical reasons. First, it would be too early. Some signatory countries have only very recently made the legal provisions regarding the introduction of two-cycle degree structures. Implementation researchers agree that a minimum time span of about eight to ten years is needed to evaluate the impact of policy changes on the ground (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Sabatier, 2003). Second, investigating the implementation of two-cycle degree structures in thousands of HEIs spread across four European countries would simply be beyond the scope of this study.

In my definition of national policy formulation and policy change, I include national implementation policy, i.e., the degree to which a decision on the transition to the adapted degree structures has been taken at national level. As far as this degree of national decision-making is implied in the mode of implementation (e.g., legal provision, contract policy, voluntary adoption by HEIs), the latter is also taken into account. The implementation policy is indispensable in a complete analysis of policy formulation and policy change, as it crucially determines the reach and importance of material policies formulated on different design features of two-cycle degree structures.

Furthermore, while the focus of this study is how the country-specific design of two-cycle degree structures emerges from *national-level* debates that take place in the policy formulation phase, there are of course interdependencies and feed-back processes between these debates and implementation within HEIs which should not be ignored. Especially in countries where the policy formulation process stretches over a lengthy period of time and is subject to repeated modifications and alterations, experience with implementation at the level of HEIs is likely to inform and influence the national discourse on the introduction of two-cycle degree structures. This study considers such experience where it is needed to understand national actors' perceptions and preferences, especially if aggregate results are available. For example, the positions of national vice chancellors' associations are included in the analysis, as well as existing survey results on the national implementation of two-cycle degree structures.

2.3   Governance theory: multi-level, multi-actor governance

PROPOSITION 3. The Bologna process as a whole as well as adaptations of national degree structures are most adequately understood within a framework of multi-actor, multi-level governance. Though governance structures of current European HE systems vary with respect to the extent to which national governments can 'steer' HE in a top-down way or have to take into account the various stakeholders, they can in general be characterised as multi-actor, multi-level systems.

The discussion in the last section focused on the implications of general insights from implementation research for this study. I alluded to the inadequacy of a top-down approach for the Bologna process as a European, yet non-EU process—and as a process largely driven by national states but strongly influenced by international dynamics. These characteristics of the Bologna process shall now be dealt with considering developments in governance theory. I discuss three aspects; an overall framework for understanding governance that can be applied to the Bologna process as a whole (section 2.3.1); a framework for understanding national policy making as a multi-level, multi-actor process (section 2.3.2); and concepts for analysing the interaction of national-level and European-level policy formulation (section 2.3.3).

2.3.1 An overall framework of governance

Mayntz (1998) provides a concise summary of the developments in governance theory that have successively led to the emergence of a model of multi-level, multi-actor governance as the most adequate theoretical answer to the changed empirical reality of policy making. The starting point of policy research after World War II was a planning model which envisaged a clear separation of policy development by government and policy implementation by public agencies—the above mentioned classical stages approach. The first extension of this basic paradigm was triggered by the findings of early implementation research (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), which drew attention to the pervasiveness of policy failure. This led to the inclusion of a bottom-up perspective to account for target-group behaviour (Hjern & Hull, 1982) but also sectoral structures as elements to be taken seriously in the implementation process (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995b). This extension already carried the seed of the second innovation, namely to regard societal systems as self-regulating networks that do not only come into play in the implementation phase but participate in policy development as well—the above mentioned blurring-of-phases phenomenon. A third extension was to include the effect of European policies upon domestic sectoral structures and policy making; the fourth to make the European level of policy making itself an object of analysis and to pay attention to the "mutual interdependence between national and European policy processes in a multi-level system" (Mayntz, 1998: 6). The fifth and last extension highlighted by Mayntz is one that governance theory still struggles with today: how to account for those developments commonly referred to as 'globalisation' in the absence of an "identifiable steering subject" and an "institutionalized framework containing the object of steering" (ibid: 7), as well as how to re-conceptualise democracy in face of these developments (Held & McGrew, 2000). All five extensions need to be taken into account when analysing the Bologna process.

Recent definitions of governance reflect these refinements. Following Rosenau (2000: 181), "it seems a mistake to adhere to a narrow definition [of governance] in which only formal institutions at the national and international levels are considered relevant". Therefore, "the concept of governance should not be restricted to the national and international systems but should be used in relation to regional, provincial and local governments as well as to others social systems such as education".[17] According to Peters & Pierre (2001: 131-132),

> a baseline definition of multi-level governance is that it refers to negotiated, non-hierarchical exchanges between institutions at the transnational, national, regional and local levels. […] Although we tend to think of these institutional levels as vertically ordered, institutional relationships do not have to operate through intermediary levels but can take place directly between, say, the transnational and regional levels, thus bypassing the state level.

At a general level, the concept of multi-level governance thus applies to the entire Bologna process with its characteristic interaction of a multitude of formal and informal, sub-national, national and international actors. Schematically, this interaction is depicted in Figure 2.2.

The Bologna declaration is thus a case in point for the realities of multi-actor, multi-level governance: multi-actor because a multitude of political players shape policy formulation and implementation at the European and national levels, multi-level because the interaction of the national and European levels as well as the interaction between HEIs, national governments and intermediary institutions need to be taken into account.

We might easily lose sight of the particular role of the national level in the overall development of the Bologna process taking into account the stress on the myriad of actors and their interactions inherent in the concept of multi-level, multi-actor governance. The national level might just appear as one among many layers and actors involved in a complex governance system. Within the framework of multi-level, multi-actor governance, I make a clear decision to focus this study on national-level policy formulation (see section 2.2 for a justification). I now turn to a theoretical treatment of this topic (section 2.3.2), before reflecting upon the interaction between the national and international levels (section 2.3.3).

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[17] The latter part of the definition is taken by Rosenau from King & Schneider (1991: 181-182).

Figure 2.2: Multi-level policy interaction in the Bologna process
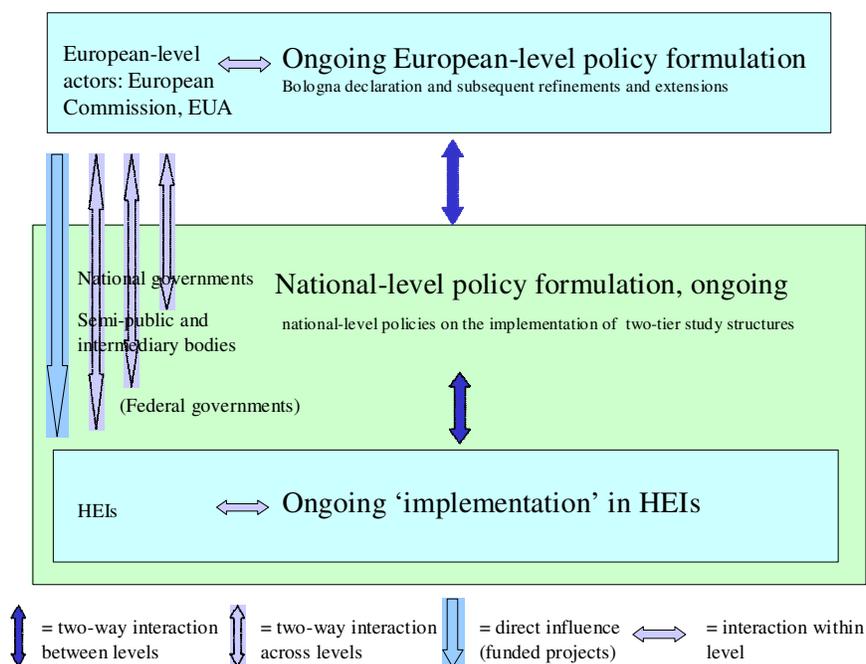
2.3.2 The nature of national policy formulation

As explained in section 2.2, neither the Bologna declaration nor the move to two-cycle degree structures can be considered a 'policy' in the classical sense. The Bologna declaration is too vague and lacks the means for immediate implementation that characterise a policy. Regarding national adaptations of degree structures, whether these qualify as policies in the classical sense is contingent on the respective HE policy system. The more the system is characterised by a top-down planning approach, the closer the introduction of two-cycle degree structures comes to a classical policy, i.e., its content and mechanisms are comprehensively enshrined in legal provision. However, in the HE systems dealt with in this study, adaptations of national degree structures are not simply imposed by law, but take shape in a complex interaction between the various actors in HE policy who issue policy proposals, recommendations, draft regulations, engage in lobbying, start implementation etc. The issuing of a government regulation on adaptations of degree structures may then in fact be

the result of this process. When referring to adaptations of national degree structures as policy change, I do not confine this to the narrow definition of a classical policy; I see the entire process by which the country-specific patterns of two-cycle degree structures take shape as part of policy formulation, including position papers, newspaper articles, conferences, implementation on the ground and the like. This ties in with the definition of policy formulation presented in section 2.2.

Though current governance structures of European HE systems vary with respect to the degree to which the national government can 'steer' HE in a top-down way or take into account the various stakeholders (Van Vught, 1994), in general they are most adequately characterised as systems of multi-level, multi-actor governance (Mayntz, 1997, 1998; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c). Van Waarden (1995) provides a typology of different traditions of policy making within Europe that seems relevant in understanding the policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures in different national contexts. Roughly speaking, the author distinguishes three different policy styles: 'liberal-pluralism' (England), 'étatism' (France) and 'corporatism' (Germany, the Netherlands). Van Waarden argues that

> given the differences in style of implementation, it is likely that EC [European Commission]-regulations will be implemented differently in various member states, as long as implementation remains the domain of the member states. In some countries the administrators will involve interest associations—or even delegate implementation to them—in others they will not or less. In some implementation will be done centrally and through imposition, in others locally, and through negotiations with the clientele (ibid: 365).

For example, corporatist policy making is characterised as follows:

> In Germany and the Netherlands there is like in France also a conception of active state involvement in civil society, but here the state uses organisations of civil society itself, such as interest associations, as intermediaries and 'assistants' in policy formulation and implementation (ibid: 339).

Van Waarden's analysis draws attention to a possible flaw of using a multi-actor approach in the analysis of HE policy making: this might include the implicit presumption of a corporatist or possibly liberal-pluralist model of HE policy formulation less suited to capture the étatist tradition.

I maintain that the HE sector is characterised by a network-like governance structure even in countries that follow the étatist tradition. This is confirmed by different HE researchers with a wide overview of European HE systems. As Becher and Kogan (1980: 121) put it, in the case of HE,

> we are not dealing with a hierarchical system, where change can be decreed from above, but rather with a negotiative one, in which individuals, basic

> units and institutions regard themselves as having the right to decide what is best for them. It follows that any innovative proposal has to be finally sanctioned by those who are in a position to put it into effect.

Cerych and Sabatier (1986: 250) also acknowledge that implementation analysis in HE is different from other areas of public policy in that

> the special problems posed by HE reform implementation are set primarily by the many autonomous actors present, and by the diffusion of authority throughout the structure. [...] Policy implementation then becomes very interactive, and implementation analysis becomes a study of the respective interactions.

In others words, even in countries with an étatist tradition, the nature of the HE system imposes a certain inclination towards a network approach.

To conclude, there is consensus in the literature that national policies on adaptations of national degree structures tend to emerge from the interaction of a multitude of public, semi-public, and private actors in national HE systems. The theoretical framework used for this study should account for this fact. Actor-centred institutionalism, an approach developed specifically for the analysis of policy formulation in public and semi-public sectors (Mayntz, 1997, 1998; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c), will therefore constitute a central building block in my theoretical framework. The approach will be presented in-depth in section 3.2.

2.3.3   Interaction of national and the European levels

While national policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures constitutes the focus of my research, the influence of the European context shall be taken into account. In this section, some concepts from the literature on European governance are checked for relevance to my research topic. Most of this literature deals with the European Union and is therefore only partially applicable to the Bologna process, which, though increasingly influenced by European Commission policies, is as such not an EU process. Nevertheless, there are parallels to be found and useful lessons to be learned.

Research on EU governance grapples with the fact that the European Union is more than a "forum of interstate bargaining" (Pierson, 1996: 124) but less than a federal system (March & Olsen, 1998: 967-8; Mayntz, 1998) and thus does not fit either models of international relations or models of the nation state. To grasp this hybrid nature, Héritier (1999: 7) coins the term "unsettled polity" to be understood as an "on-going process on the basis of interest diversity, consensual decision-making and institutional fragmentation". Jordan (2001) cautions that while the conceptualisation of the European Union as a system of 'multi-level governance' evokes useful connotations of the complexity of policy-making and

the increasing dispersion of power in a system of governance without government (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992), it is as such of little explanatory value.

SCHARPF'S MODES OF GOVERNANCE. Scharpf (2000b) responds to this problem by conceptualising "multi-level Europe" as a set of interaction modes that apply to varying extent to different aspects of European policy making: 'mutual adjustment', 'intergovernmental negotiation', 'hierarchical direction', and 'joint decisions'. These modes are an application to Europe of the four modes of co-ordination developed in Scharpf (1997, see section 3.2) for national-level policy analysis, and shed useful light on European-level policy formulation in the Bologna process. According to Scharpf (2000b; see also 2002), there is an inherent asymmetry in the different modes of EU policy co-ordination. While the European Union is capable of 'hierarchical direction' in some policy fields (mostly those related to the creation of a common market and the safeguarding of competition exercised by the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice, and the European Commission), in other policy fields, the EU is dependent on 'joint decisions' by the Council of Ministers and, increasingly, the European Parliament. The latter are concentrated on the market-correcting side and include the field of education in addition to environmental regulation and social policy. A yet weaker form of institutionalisation is the coordination mode of 'intergovernmental negotiation', according to which

> national policies are co-ordinated or standardised by agreements at the European level, but national governments remain in full control of the decision process, none of them can be bound without its own consent, and the transformation of agreements into national law and their implementation remains fully under their control (ibid: 13).

If the more developed forms of policy coordination fail, the "default mode of Europeanised policy responses" (Scharpf 2000: 11) comes into play: 'mutual adjustment', the European-level correspondence to what Scharpf calls "unilateral action in an anarchic field and minimum institutions" in his more general formulation (Scharpf 1997: 97). Unilateral action comes in three forms; non-cooperative games, negative coordination, and mutual adjustment, the last of which is characterised by a 'messy' and overly complex situation in which no player is able to foresee the full implications of the 'game' and eventual equilibrium is reached only in an iterative and highly path dependent process of moves and countermoves.

   At the European level, the Bologna process is largely dominated by the coordination mode of 'mutual adjustment': in the absence of a binding agreement, actors "may communicate and conclude agreements, but they are also free to break such agreements if it suits their interests" (Scharpf 1997: 98). This coordination mode is typical of the "anarchy of the international system" (Waltz 1954 in Scharpf 1997: 98) and results in "spontaneous social orders".

While different European-level actors like the European Commission and increasingly national governments through the institutionalised structure of the Bologna follow-up process (see chapter 5 on Europe) are trying to increase commitment to the Bologna process by applying procedures reminiscent of the EU method of 'open co-ordination' and thus move the process more in the direction of 'intergovernmental negotiations', they have done so with limited success so far.[18]

JOINT DECISION TRAP. Another worthwhile empirical question with respect to the Bologna process is how the 'joint decision trap' (Scharpf, 1988)—alternatively termed 'deadlock' by Héritier (1999: 1)—in European policy-making can be avoided in the face of "the diversity of actors' interests and the consensus-forcing nature of European institutions". Héritier argues that this happens mainly by 'subterfuge' or 'stealth', i.e., "informal strategies and process patterns that circumvent political impasses" (ibid: 1). Referring to Majone (1995), Héritier (ibid: 2) holds that "the reconciliation of unity with diversity and of competition with co-operation are the greatest challenges currently facing European policy making"; a challenge that obviously extends to the education sector (Van der Wende, 2001). She observes "a strong tendency to preserve this diversity, leading to a clash of goals which are subsequently pursued in the central political arena" (Héritier, 1999: 7). It will be interesting to analyse how this clash of goals is dealt with when it comes to the translation of the Bologna declaration into concrete European and national policies.

2.4 New institutionalism: integrating actor and structural perspectives

PROPOSITION 4. *Two major factors can be expected to influence adaptations of national degree structures: first, the inherited degree structures embedded in the respective HE systems with their structural and cultural peculiarities; second, the actor interaction in national HE policy. Both are interrelated as the inherited HE system shapes the emergent patterns of two-cycle degree structures through the interaction of actors.*

In this section, I will demonstrate how different streams of new institutionalism—economic/rational choice (section 2.4.1), sociological (section 2.4.2), historical (section 2.4.3)—give different weightings to the actor and structural perspectives, and locate my approach within these 'schools' (section 2.4.4).

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[18]　Superficially, it might look as if the Bologna declaration did fulfil the criteria for intergovernmental negotiations. However, while national governments do remain in full control of implementation, the Bologna declaration is not a binding agreement (see Verbruggen, 2002). Also, the content of the agreement is so vague that countries have a very high degree of freedom in interpreting the content of the agreement according to their own interests.

The actor-centred perspective developed in the last section does not give a complete picture. By focussing on actor interests and conceptualising adaptations of national degree structures as a power struggle, this perspective could be criticised for being 'voluntarist', i.e. for not giving enough attention to the longer-term social, cultural and historical forces that create the underlying development trends and dynamics of the HE system and condition actors' mindsets as well. Neave and Van Vught are eloquent proponents of this view, arguing that

> comparative policy studies in higher education […] walked resolutely away from the historical paradigm and embraced the social and, more especially, the economic and administrative sciences. To be sure, the application and refinement of the latter fields have sharpened immeasurably our analytical purchase over higher education. But at the same time, they have also tended to reinforce what has sometimes been called the *'tyranny of the present'* [emphasis added]. The study of higher education policy is taken up with explaining and understanding what is, and with analysing the impact that policy-driven change and adjustment in selected dimensions of the enterprise have upon others closely related to them (Neave & Van Vught, 1991: ix).

Elsewhere, Neave (2001b: 46) criticises that

> there is a tendency in comparative higher education to concentrate on analysing the function of institutions and the mechanisms of educational and administrative procedures as if these processes may the more easily be grasped by *stripping them away from their cultural, political and historic settings* [emphasis added].

This study combines two research perspectives: one stressing structural and cultural continuities and the contingency of the present on the past (structural view), and one focusing on the present political struggle about the change of existing structures by intentional actors (actor-centred view). It aims to integrate both perspectives by tracing how aspects of the inherited HE system feature in the perceptions and preferences of actors who in turn shape the adaptations of degree structures.

These two research perspectives correspond to two major strands in social science in general: agency and structure (Abrams, 1982). While Abrams lays out the tension and relationship between the two with respect to the field of historical sociology, his point about their paradox relationship is a general one: "human agency becomes human bondage because of the very nature of human agency" (Dawe 1979 in Abrams: xiv). It is the results of past action that we are faced with as structure in the present.

> All varieties of sociology stress the so-called 'two-sidedness' of the social world, presenting it as a world of which we are both the creators and the creatures, both makers and prisoners; a world which our actions construct and a world that powerfully constrains us. The distinctive quality of the world for the sociologist is, accordingly, its factivity—the way in which society is experienced by individuals as a fact-like system, external, given, coercive, even while individuals are busy making and re-making it through their own imagination, communication and action. […] The two-sidedness of society, the fact that social action is both something we choose to do and something we have to do, is inseparably bound up with the further fact that whatever reality society has is an historical reality, a reality in time (Abrams 1982: 2).

The ambition to come to grips with this 'two-sidedness of society' by integrating different research perspectives locates my study in the tradition of 'new institutionalism'. This is a highly diverse body of literature stretching across different disciplines in the social sciences, the beginning of which is often traced to March and Olsen's (1984) pioneering work "The New Institutionalism: Organisational Factors in Political Life".

Three strands of new institutionalism are commonly distinguished: a sociological, a historical, and an economic/rational choice variant (Aspinwall & Schneider, 2000; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Kariithi, 2001; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). What unites the different varieties of new institutionalism is that all of them grapple with the question of how "institutions affect the behaviour of individuals" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 7). In the words of March & Olsen (1998: 948), "an institutional approach is one that emphasizes the role of institutions and institutionalisation in the understanding of human actions within an organisation, social order, or society". Another commonality of the different new institutionalisms is that their concept of 'institutions' differs from the colloquial use of the term. In new institutionalism, the term 'institution' is not generally used as a synonym for 'organisation', but rather to denote sets of rules and norms that can, but do not need to coincide with the rules and norms that constitute an 'organisation'. This having been said, the more specific conceptualisation of 'institutions' varies greatly between the three streams and indeed, the lack of agreement and precision in the definition of 'institutions' is one of the major criticisms forwarded against new institutionalism (Jepperson, 1991; Lepsius, 1997). What distinguishes the three approaches besides the definition of institutions, are the assumptions about actor behaviour, and the relationship between institutions and actors (see Table 2.1 at the end of this section). There are considerable areas of overlap of course, as well as cross-fertilisation and borrowing of ideas between the approaches (see Aspinwall & Schneider, 2000; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Norgaard, 1996; Thelen, 1999); therefore, the ensuing characterisation necessarily remains somewhat crude.

2.4.1 Economic/rational choice institutionalism

Though its origins can be traced back to the 1930s (Coase, 1937), it was not before the late 1970s that new economic institutionalism gained importance as a stream within economics (Williamson, 1979). Economic institutionalists sought to render economic models more realistic by adding aspects such as transaction costs, incomplete information, and principal-agent problems to classical microeconomic theory, thereby introducing 'institutions' into the previously institution-free world of economic model building. In economic institutionalism, the concept of institutions tends to remain confined to formal rules, laws, and contracts that constitute the 'rules of the game' for actors' utility maximising behaviour. As usual in economic theory, actor preferences are externally defined and it is assumed that actors maximise their individual self-interest. Comparable to the distinction between rules and players in a game, institutions and players are thus clearly separable. The strength of economic institutionalism is that it allows for clear hypotheses about political outcomes under different institutional settings though this comes at the cost of simplifying assumptions about actor behaviour. Different strands within economic institutionalism have focused on different questions: while Coase (1937; 1960) sought to explain how institutions come about by using the central concept of transaction costs, game theory focuses on the results of different institutional arrangements, and economic historians (like North, 1981) investigate the role of institutions in economic development. The considerable influence that economic institutionalism, especially its game theoretical strand, has had on political science can be traced in the rational choice literature in political science (Scharpf, 1997; Shepsle, 1979, 1989). What is characteristic of this approach is to "posit that the relevant actors have a fixed set of preferences", to "see politics as a series of collective action dilemmas", to "emphasize the role of strategic interaction", and to explain the existence of institutions by reference to "gains from cooperation" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 12-13).

2.4.2 Sociological institutionalism

Sociological institutionalism dates back to the late 1970s when it emerged as a subfield of organisation sociology. Clearly stated in the title "The New Institutionalism: Organisational Factors in Political Life" (March & Olsen, 1984), the major contribution of sociological institutionalism was to apply the organisational sociology perspective to the political field. Instead of explaining prevalent institutional patterns rationally, as was common in political science so far, institutions were interpreted culturally, as "myth and ceremony" (J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In sociological institutionalism, institutions are understood in very broad terms to include "not just formal rules, procedures, or norms, but the symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that provide the 'frames of meaning' guiding human action" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 14).

According to sociological institutionalists, actor behaviour is guided by the logic of 'social legitimacy' or 'social appropriateness' (March & Olsen, 1989) rather than a rational means-ends logic. What is socially legitimate and appropriate is enshrined in the existing institutional patterns—patterns of behaviour, inherited norms (Zucker, 1983). In the words of March & Olsen (1998: 948),

> an institution can be viewed as a relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations. Such practices and rules are embedded in structures of meaning and schemes of interpretation that explain and legitimise particular identities and the practices and rules associated with them.

Sociological institutionalists thus break down the conceptual divide between 'institutions' and 'culture', or to put it radically, they "redefine 'culture' itself as 'institution'" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 15). For the relationship between institutions and actors, this means that institutions are not only assumed to "affect the strategic calculations of individuals, as rational choice institutionalists contend, but also their most basic preferences and very identity" (ibid: 15). As a consequence, structure and agency virtually melt together and can no longer be analytically separated—in my view the major drawback of this approach.

2.4.3   Historical institutionalism

Historical institutionalism assumes a middle position between the sociological and rational choice perspectives and includes a wide range of approaches tending to one or the other side. Its understanding of institutions is eclectic, including both "formal and informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organisational structure of the polity or political economy" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 6). Historical institutionalism sees institutions not only as the arena for strategic interaction, but stresses that institutions also influence the definition of actors' interests, perceptions, and the goals they set for themselves.[19] Sociological institutionalism therefore acknowledges the role of 'culture' and 'calculus' in how institutions affect behaviour. In contrast to sociological institutionalism however, it does not see actors as determined by the institutional framework within which they operate: degrees of freedom exist and institutions and actors can be analytically distinguished. In contrast to rational choice, actor

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[19]   In the words of Thelen (2002: 104), "historical institutionalism is concerned not just with how a particular set of rules affects the strategic orientations of individual actors and their interactions, but also with the broader issue of the ways in which institutional configurations define what Skocpol has termed 'fields of action' that have a very broad influence not just on the strategies of individual players but on the identities of actors and the networks that define their relations to each other".

motives include more than just narrow economic self-interest and extend to the normative sphere.

Historical institutionalists are interested in explaining different national policy responses to similar political challenges, using the way "political institutions structure the kinds of interests most likely to be represented in the policy process" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 9) and the way "unique economic and political traditions (...) colour state responses to social demand or external change" (ibid: 13) as major explanatory factors. In doing so, they tend to pay attention to both the wider context in which political developments take place and the development of institutions over longer periods of time.[20] "Institutions are seen as relatively persistent features of the political landscape and one of the central factors pushing historical development along a set of 'paths'" (ibid: 9). The attention to longer-term institutional developments and the role of sequencing and time in explaining political outcomes more generally (Pierson, 2000c), has resulted in a wealth of literature around the concept of path dependence, which will be explored in depth in the next section. Here it suffices to say that this concept is being used by historical institutionalists to explain the emergence, continuity, and change of institutions over time (Thelen, 2002).

Table 2.1: The three new institutionalisms

Dimensions	Sociological institutionalism	Historical institutionalism	Economic/rational choice institutionalism
Concept of institutions	Institutions as 'culture'; stresses norms and values enshrined in 'patterns of behaviour', but also includes rules	Equal weight given to formal and informal rules, procedures, norms and conventions	Rules, procedures

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[20] The attention to context has an important methodological implication: historic institutionalism does not seek to go beyond the development of middle range theory. This decision is "driven less by a disdain for theory than the conviction that deeper understanding of causal relationships (i.e., good theory) can often be achieved through a more intense and focused examination of a number of carefully selected cases" (Thelen, 2002: 95).

Dimensions	Sociological institutionalism	Historical institutionalism	Economic/rational choice institutionalism
Relationship between institutions and actors	Institutions provide "moral or cognitive templates for interpretation and action" (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Institutional norms & values internalised by individuals	Institutions influence actors perceptions and preferences, but do not determine them	Institutions provide the incentives, scope and limits for action and thus constitute the framework in which utility maximising behaviour of individuals takes place
Actor motivation	Concern with legitimacy and appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989); 'culture'	Self-interest as well as normative goals; modified egoism; 'calculus' and 'culture'	Narrowly defined economic self-interest; 'calculus'
Concept of agency	No separate agency	"institutional actor" = agency constrained or structured by common agreement	Methodological individualism
Time horizon	Long term	Long term	Short term
Independent and intervening variables	Institutions as major independent variables and actors as intervening	institutions as independent variables and actors as intervening	Actors as the independent variables and institutions as intervening
Typical research method	Inductive; case studies, thick description	Mixture of inductive and deductive approaches; analytical case studies	Deductive; illustration of hypotheses

Source: Adapted from Aspinwall & Schneider (2000).

2.4.4   Location of my approach

Of these three strands, my own research perspective has the most in common with historical institutionalism—this holds with respect to the concept of institutions, the concept of actors, and the relationship between the two, as well as my interest in international comparative studies into policy responses to similar challenges. In spite of this general consonance, most of the writing in historical institutionalism does not really provide concrete assistance in designing a theoretical framework for two main reasons: first, the research topics chosen

generally relate to broader issues of socio-economic history such as the welfare state (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Pierson, 1994), social policy (Skocpol, 1995)[21], revolutions (Skocpol, 1979), or economic policy (Hall, 1992). Second, though scholars in this area rightly defend the claim to work on the basis of theory and have documented considerable effort to make explicit the theoretical underpinnings of their work (Pierson, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Skocpol, 1984; Thelen, 1999, 2002; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992), this is largely confined to ex-post exercises to tease out a number of interesting concepts without really resulting in a comprehensive theory. Moreover, the studies themselves are largely characterised by interestingly written, but longwinded narratives that seem to conceal the theoretical concepts they announce in the initial chapter.

This is different for the two approaches I chose to combine for my theoretical framework; North's model of institutional change and Mayntz & Scharpf's actor-centred institutionalism. Both stand out for their clear concepts and workable definitions of actors, institutions, and their relationships. Though both frameworks are clearly part of the new institutionalist effort to come to grips with the relationship of institutions and actors, it seems neither possible nor adequate to unequivocally place either North or Mayntz & Scharpf in one of the three strands. Whereas North is an economist, the theoretical approach he develops in his 1990 book "Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance", extends beyond economics and rational choice into historic and even sociological institutionalism in that it embraces the concepts of path dependence and includes culture in its concept of institutions. This becomes even more explicit in later extensions of the model with Denzau (Denzau & North, 1994). In an opposite movement, the actor-centred institutionalism developed by Mayntz and Scharpf (1995) starts out from a pragmatic combination of sociological and political science elements, but is later sharpened and codified in game-theoretic terms in Scharpf's 1997 book "Games Real Actors Play". In an almost ironic change of roles, the economist North provides a well-developed framework for the 'institutional' side, while the political scientist Scharpf and the sociologist Mayntz focus more on the 'action' side, so that their lenses can be used in a complementary way. In spite of the different foci, both approaches agree that

> social phenomena are to be explained as the outcome of interactions among intentional actors [...], but that these interactions are structured, and the outcomes shaped, by the characteristics of the institutional settings within which they occur (Scharpf 1997: 1).

To conclude, while the integrative character of the two frameworks is typical of historical institutionalism, it seems more adequate to regard each of them as an

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[21] Though Skocpol is a sociologist by discipline, I see her in the stream of historical institutionalism in terms of her writing.

intelligent combination of all three streams, with overlapping yet distinguishable foci. The two frameworks will be presented in detail in sections 3.1 and 3.2.

Before doing that, however, one last aspect shall be explored for its relevance to my research topic, namely the research stream on path dependence; a particular perspective within sociological and historical institutionalism under which North's work can also be subsumed. I will in fact show that North's framework for the analysis of institutional change can be regarded as a synthesis of the two major research strands of path dependence, and is, also from this perspective, well suited for the study of adaptations of HE systems in the context of the Bologna process.

2.5   Path dependence: two strands and a proposed synthesis

PROPOSITION 5. Whether the sum of the national policy formulation processes will contribute to the convergence of European HE systems is difficult to foresee as these are subject to conflicting forces: on the one hand, HE systems in Europe are shaped by diverse national traditions and cultural peculiarities that create inertia and persistence; on the other hand, the joint European agenda agreed upon in the Bologna declaration and developed further in subsequent conferences has the potential to create a special dynamic that might lead to significant system change and convergence towards common aims.

In addition to the national context, national policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures is influenced by the discourse and progress of the Bologna process at the European level. Enhancing the international competitiveness and the attractiveness of the 'European system of higher education' as well as the mobility and employability of European citizens are stated aims of the Bologna declaration and officially shared by the signing ministers.

My study also pays attention to the way in which this 'manifest agenda' is reflected in the motives and interests of national actors, as well as to the particular dynamics deriving from the complex interaction of national and international policy formulation. The concept of path dependence seems particularly suited to explore tensions between 'national inertia' and 'international push factors' as it includes both facets: one stressing persistence and one focussing on the dynamics created by processes subject to positive feedback (Arthur, 1994; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c; Pierson, 2000a). The challenge is to integrate both aspects into one model.

Pierson (2000a) insists that there is much more to path dependence than the assertion that "history matters". Recent theoretical efforts in historical institutionalism have come a long way in disassembling the concept, logically distinguishing the different connotations of the term, and clarifying the ways in which the concept can be employed for analysis (Pierson, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c;

Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). Major aspects have been distilled and pursued in two different research strands.

(1) The research strand on continuity, persistence, and inertia uses the notion of path dependence to account for the continuity of patterns over time (Goodin, 1996; Hannan & Freeman, 1989; North, 1990; Pierson, 1993, 2000b; Weir & Skocpol, 1985). It asks why inherited institutions are so difficult to change and how they impact the perceptions and interaction of actors. Applied to my research topic, this perspective would highlight how the emerging two-cycle systems are influenced, if not shaped by the inherited degree structures and the overall institutional context of the HE system.

(2) The research strand on critical junctures, feedback loops, and lock-in is concerned with contingent events that trigger the emergence of entirely new development paths and may lead to the "lock-in" of new technologies or structures (Arthur, 1994; Mahoney, 2000; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c; Pierson, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). The interest here is the phenomenon where despite institutional inertia, entirely new institutional patterns are sometimes established. This line of thought could be used in my research to analyse the dynamics of the Bologna process that derive from the complex interaction of different national-level and international actors and might ultimately foster the prevalence of a certain 'model' for the two-cycle degree structure.

As I argue, both research perspectives have their shortcomings in that they are one-sided and not immediately compatible. However, I hold that research into the dynamics of institutional change has the potential to integrate the two perspectives. Institutional change may be gradual, or sudden. An encompassing model of institutional change must account for both, and I hold that North's model fulfils this demand if adequately interpreted. While his 1990 book stresses gradualism and is thus closer to the inertia strand (Fiori, 2002), the concept of 'mental models' introduced in the same book and further elaborated in Denzau & North (1994) constitutes the bridge to explaining sudden changes.

Before presenting North's model of institutional change in more detail, each of the two opposite perspectives shall briefly be presented, the causal mechanisms described, and their potential for my research explored.

2.5.1 Continuity, persistence and inertia

The starting point for many new institutional studies in the 1970s was the failure of convergence theories to explain the "persistence of cross-national differences despite common challenges and pressures" (Thelen & Steinmo 1992:5), such as the oil price shocks. As an economist, North sought to explain why convergence in socio-economic development was not as fast and complete as expected. His explanation hinges upon the idea that countries' development paths are determined by their different starting points (North, 1990). A range of factors

have been identified in the literature that provide reasons for persistence or inertia.

(1) **INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS.** Thelen and Steinmo (1992: 6) highlight "intermediate-level institutional factors—corporatist arrangements, policy networks linking economic groups to the state bureaucracy, party structures—and the role they play in defining the constellations of incentives and constraints faced by political actors in different national contexts." Translated to HE systems, this points to variance in the institutional set-up of HE policy systems (notably their governance) as an important explanatory factor for differences in national responses to the challenge of adapting degree structures.

(2) **NESTED RULES.** According to Goodin (1996), nested rules create predictability and stability. New policies must "often pass through multiple veto points, often requiring broad supermajorities". The higher a rule is in the hierarchy, the more difficult it is to change. Sometimes, changes are even prevented by the constitution, "e.g. by providing veto power to those who would lose protections or privileges as a result of possible reforms" (Pierson 2000b: 491). Translated to HE, rules about degree structures are nested if reform requires changes in other regulatory areas in- or outside of HE, for example entry regulations to professional practice; or if certain cultural features are protected by the constitution, such as the 'freedom of research and teaching' at German universities.

(3) **COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONS.** Coming from an economic perspective, North (1990) draws attention to how existing organisations shape incentive structures for current actors. As the various institutions in a context of action are designed to complement each other, incentive structures are stabilised and reinforced by coordination effects of complementary institutions, which may be nested as in the above example.

(4) **NON-DECISION MAKING.** Bachrach & Baratz (1962) point out that the status quo might be reinforced by what they call non-decision making, which is ensured by those who hold power in that they are in a position to prevent certain issues from rising on the agenda. In the context of this study, non-decision making would mean that those who have vested interests in maintaining the inherited degree structures can present themselves as less in need for justification than those who have to argue in favour of change.

All the mentioned factors stabilise the status quo by increasing the exit costs from the current institutional order, to which individuals and organisations are well adapted (Pierson, 2000b).

(5) **MENTAL MAPS.** In addition to the direct constraining effect they exert, inherited institutions also determine the way ideas are processed and thus constitute a filter through which actors perceive their environment. In this way they influence the creation of mental maps (North, 1990; Pierson, 2000b) and shared mental models

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(Denzau & North, 1994: 3-4) which actors use to navigate in an environment characterised by complexity and uncertainty:

> Under conditions of uncertainty, individuals' interpretation of their environment will reflect their learning. Individuals with common cultural backgrounds and experiences will share reasonably convergent mental models, ideologies, and institutions (ibid: 3-4).

These mental maps are not necessarily self-correcting. Instead, "confirming information tends to be incorporated, while disconfirming information is filtered out" (Pierson, 2000b: 489). In recognising that rather than acting rationally, people act at least "in part upon the basis of myths, dogmas, ideologies and 'half-baked' theories", North and Denzau (1994: 3-4) incorporate insights from cognitive psychology and sociological institutionalism.

(6) POLICY LEGACIES. Weir & Skocpol (1985: 119) develop the related concept of 'policy legacies'. It refers to the view that

> the goals of politically active groups, policy intellectuals, and politicians can never simply be 'read off' their current structural positions. Instead, the investigator must take into account meaningful reactions to previous policies. Such reactions colour the very interests and ideals that politically engaged actors define for themselves at a given point.

From this perspective, "policy making is inherently a historical—that is, over time—process in which all actors consciously build on and/or react against previous governmental efforts for dealing with the same (or similar) problems" (ibid: 119). Past ideas and ideological struggles become part of the inherited context that "colours" present political debates and outcomes. It will be interesting to pursue the trace of policy legacies when analysing the debates about adaptations of degree structures in the various countries. It should be expected that previous attempts at similar and related reforms be mirrored in the current discourse and influence the way two-cycle degree structures are perceived (i.e., as regressive or progressive, as an attempt at 'Americanisation', 'cost cutting', 'vocationalisation' or the like).[22]

To recapitulate, the research strand around inertia and persistence seeks to explain why institutions are hard to change and to study the effects of stable institutions on the interaction of actors within the structuring framework they provide. This perspective could be criticised for explaining only why institutions do not or hardly change, instead of giving clues for how they do; these shortcomings are highlighted by different authors (Thelen, 1999; Thelen &

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[22] A renowned example of an approach to education research that resonates with the inertia strand of the path dependence literature is Katz' (1971) book on the "illusion of education change".

Steinmo, 1992). After presenting the second conceptualisation of path dependence, I will return to this discussion and show how this perspective can be extended to account for the notion of institutional change.

2.5.2 Critical junctures, feedback loops, and lock-in

In the literature on critical junctures, the perspective is reversed from how "institutions shape politics" to how "politics shape institutions" (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). The puzzle addressed by this research is why contingent events can have far-reaching consequences and what may lead to the 'lock-in' of entirely new and possibly unexpected institutional patterns. Researchers in this tradition hold that timing and sequencing matter, and highlight the existence of formative or critical moments in history that largely determine the subsequent pattern of events. In effect, small and unnoticed events may trigger "particular courses of action" that, "once introduced, can be almost impossible to reverse" (Pierson, 2000a: 251).

The social sciences literature in this field has strongly profited from importing economic explanations for the success of certain new technologies to the political realm. The issue was first raised by David (1985) who presented the puzzle of how the QWERTY keyboard came to prevail even though it was not necessarily the most efficient way of organising a typewriter keyboard. Arthur (1988; 1989; 1994) was the first economist to come up with a formal explanatory model, using the concept of 'increasing returns'. Simply speaking, increasing returns bring about path dependence because they affect that once a certain path has been chosen, the costs of switching increase more and more over time, providing an incentive for sticking to the chosen path even if in retrospect it might not appear the most desirable one. Arthur analytically distinguishes four different sources of self-reinforcing mechanisms, or increasing returns, associated with the introduction of new technologies:

(1) substantial set-up or fixed costs, which imply that unit costs fall with increasing production;

(2) learning effects, which mean that experience improves products or lowers their costs;

(3) coordination effects derived from cooperating with other firms in the same market; and

(4) self-reinforcing—or adaptive—expectations, which support the expansion of a technology that is expected to prevail.

He also derives the properties of economies characterised by increasing returns, namely (a) multiple equilibra, which translate into unpredictability as many outcomes are possible; (b) possible inefficiency, implying that it is not necessarily the best or most efficient technology that prevails; (c) lock-in, which is equivalent to inertia; and (d) path dependence, which he uses narrowly to denote the

phenomenon of 'nonergodicity' (Arthur, 1994: 112-113), i.e., "historical 'small events' are not averaged away and 'forgotten' by dynamics—they may decide the outcome" (Arthur, 1989).

North and later Pierson argued that Arthur's ideas can be transferred to the social and political realm, and applied to institutions (North, 1990) as well as public policies (Pierson, 2000a). If the adaptation of national degree structures is regarded as a public policy directed at institutional change, all four features of the increasing returns phenomena can be identified in the design phase.

(1) SUBSTANTIAL SET-UP COSTS. Deciding for and switching to a different national degree structure is a costly investment for political bodies as well as HEIs. Once the decision is made, it cannot easily be reversed.

(2) LEARNING EFFECTS. Understanding and implementing the new degree structure, including instruments such as modularisation and the European credit transfer system (ECTS), involves a costly learning process for political bodies as well as HEIs. Once the structures are implemented, actors learn how to optimise their use of the structures.

(3) COORDINATION EFFECTS. One of the explicit aims of the Bologna declaration is for all participants to reap positive network externalities from a higher degree of flexibility and transferability. This only functions if degree structures actually become more similar, or at least more transparent. Therefore, once a certain degree structure is perceived as being predominant, this provides a strong incentive for adopting the same structure.

(4) ADAPTIVE EXPECTATIONS "occur when individuals feel a need to 'pick the right horse' because options that fail to win broad acceptance will have drawbacks later on" (Pierson, 2000b: 492). Already, expectations that Europe is moving towards a system of two-cycle degree structures is an important argument used by change agents to convince institutions of implementing the new structure. There is a self-fulfilling dynamic in this: if many actors believe it, the new structures will spread, and this will prove that the decision was right. The same argument can be made with respect to the length of the first and second-degree cycles: if the majority of actors believe that '3+2', rather than e.g., '3+1' or '4+1', will be the dominant future model in Europe, this belief provides a strong incentive to adapt to the expected structure.

The formation of 'mental maps' presented in the last section can be used to demonstrate how all four features work together in an interrelated way; to generate the necessary support for joint action, mental maps that are shared by other actors need to be created (*co-ordination effects*).[23] Given the different roles and interests of actors in a policy field, it is unlikely that shared mental maps

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[23] This is equivalent to Mayntz/Scharpf's 1995 concept of *"übereinstimmende Situationsdeutungen"*, i.e.. congruent perceptions of a situation.

emerge spontaneously; they have to be actively created and communicated (*set-up costs*). Once a mental map has been adopted, "confirming information tends to be incorporated and disconfirming information is filtered out" (Pierson, 2000a), thereby reinforcing the adopted solution (*adaptive expectations*). This is because understanding a policy change and adopting a position towards it is a costly process (*learning effects*), and actors want their 'investment' to pay off.

If these arguments hold true, we can expect the Bologna process to display a substantial degree of path dependence, and it would then be interesting to identify the 'critical junctures' and 'contingent events' that have determined the course of action so far. Pierson's concept of path dependence could then be used to explain national or institutional-level decisions to implement a two-cycle degree structure as such, as well as the chosen specification of this structure. The concept could also be applied to formulate expectations about the way the Bologna process will evolve in the future.

One further expectation derived from these arguments deserves mentioning. According to Pierson (2000b: 493), lock-in that results from self-reinforcing mechanisms has the tendency to *depoliticise* issues by rendering previously available alternatives implausible. Applied to the Bologna process, this means that if a certain pattern of two-cycle degree structures comes to prevail in Europe, adjusting to it will turn into a matter of sheer pragmatism and ideological considerations will become secondary.

To conclude, the conceptualisation of path dependence stressing contingency and feedback-loops seems particularly suited to explore the dynamics of the Bologna process emerging from the complex interaction of national and international developments. Mayntz and Scharpf (1995c: 11-12) refer to this phenomenon as "*Eigendynamik*" (momentum):

> We therefore contrast the concept of steering with the concept of '*Eigendynamik*'. According to nonlinear dynamics, social processes can be characterised by this concept if actors' motives are reinforced by the interaction among them, which particularly happens in the case of interdependence of utility. The circular causation brings about an endogenous increase of individual tendencies of behaviour. At the macro level, this can become manifest in upward or downward spirals or in cyclical fluctuations. The participants do not react to the actual behaviour of other actors, but to their own expectations about this behaviour instead [own translation].

2.5.3 The missing link: a theory of institutional change

So far, two largely opposite perspectives on path dependence have been presented, the first explaining why institutions can hardly be expected to change at all, the second dealing with the phenomenon that sometimes, sudden

unexpected changes do occur that appear to be contingent, i.e., they cannot be explained by existing theories (Mahoney, 2000).[24] While the first perspective stresses the effect of existing institutions on actors, the second reverses the logic and asks how radically new institutions come about. Several authors have noted the "bifurcation of the literature in this area"(Fiori, 2002; Thelen, 1999). And indeed, the two perspectives do not seem to be compatible at first or even second glance.

As a first approximation to the problem, it can be useful to consider the three distinct phases of path dependence distinguished by Pierson (2000c: 76):

> (1) the initial 'critical' juncture, when events trigger a movement toward a particular 'path' or trajectory out of two or more possible ones; (2) the period of reproduction, in which positive feedback reinforces the trajectory initiated in phase one; and (3) the end of the path, in which new events dislodge a long-lasting equilibrium.

While research on inertia is concerned with phase two, the critical juncture literature grapples with phases one and three. As Fiori (2002) rightly notes, both explanatory schemes are useful in explaining certain phenomena, so there is no reason for discarding either of them. However, the situation remains theoretically unsatisfying in the absence of an overarching theoretical perspective with the potential to integrate the two perspectives. Referring to punctuated equilibrium theory (as used by Krasner, 1984), Thelen & Steinmo (1992: 15) have formulated the theoretical problem as follows:

> Institutions are an independent variable and explain political outcomes in periods of stability, but when they break down, they become the dependent variable, whose shape is determined by the political conflicts that such institutional breakdown unleashes. Put somewhat differently, at the moment of institutional breakdown, the logic of the argument is reversed from 'institutions shape politics' to 'politics shape institutions'.

Apart from its theoretical problems, such a bifurcation of perspectives seems unrealistic. There may be long periods of institutional stability as well as periods of sudden and abrupt institutional change, but most of the time we expect to see institutions being subject to permanent gradual change. And even in case massive change does occur in a short period of time, in the political field it seems hardly adequate to see it as contingent. Thelen (1999: 385) therefore rightly holds that

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[24] "Contingency refers to the inability of theory to predict or explain, either deterministically or probabilistically, the occurrence of a specific outcome" (Mahoney, 2000: 513).

> as a general guide to understanding political development, the QWERTY model is both too contingent and too deterministic. It is too contingent in that the initial choice (call it a 'critical juncture') is seen as rather open and capable of being 'tipped' by small events or chance circumstances, whereas in politics this kind of blank slate is a rarity, to say the least.

Instead, the pre-decision or policy formulation stage is characterised by an intense political struggle over the aims and adequate solutions. In fact, this is what the Bologna process is all about and what I am interested in. However, the critical juncture literature has little to say about this phase. Thelen continues:

> The QWERTY model is also too deterministic in that once the initial choice is made, the argument becomes mechanical. (…) In reality, (…) the losers do not necessarily disappear, and their adaptation can mean something very different from embracing and reproducing the institution, as in the technology model. For those who are disadvantaged by prevailing institutions, adapting may mean biding their time until conditions shift, or it may mean working within the existing framework in pursuit of goals different from—even subversive to—those of the institution's designers (ibid: 385-386).

Indeed, these remarks are highly relevant to the Bologna process where analysis should not loose sight of the opponents of reforms even after two-cycle degree structures have been formally implemented.

To conclude, the missing link between the two theoretical perspectives needs to be sought in an encompassing theory of institutional change. Thelen & Steinmo (Steinmo, Thelen, & Longstreth, 1992; Thelen, 2002; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992) and Pierson (2000b) identify institutional change as one of the 'frontier issues' of historical institutionalism. While I agree with the authors that there are not as many historical institutionalist studies assuming the perspective of institutional change as there are on 'inertia' or 'critical junctures', I think that the theory exists. I see North's model of institutional change as one of the most developed theoretical concepts in the new institutionalist literature, and in the literature on path dependence in particular. Moreover, it can account for both the inertia and the critical juncture perspectives, once its theoretical core is distilled.

3   Theoretical framework

I have explained and justified major choices on the way towards a theoretical framework on the basis of a review of relevant literature on convergence, implementation and governance theory, new institutionalism, and path dependence. I have discussed how the question of convergence can be approached; why the implementation literature does not yield an adequate framework for my research interest; why the focus of my analysis is on the policy formulation processes and resulting policy change at the national level; and that a multi-level, multi-actor model of governance is needed to account for the interaction of sub-national, national, and international levels of decision-making in the Bologna process. I have also discussed in what ways my two-fold research interest in actors and inherited cultural and structural features of HE systems positions my study in the tradition of new institutionalism, and how the concept of path dependence can help to shed light on forces of system inertia and the potential dynamics emerging from an international change process characterised by positive feedback.

These choices and considerations led me to choose a theoretical framework suited to concentrate on policy formulation processes directed at policy change at the national level without neglecting the international dynamics that emerge from the interplay of the national developments. This was found in a new institutionalist framework based on North's (1990) theory of institutional change, complemented by aspects of Mayntz and Scharpf's (1995a; Scharpf, 1997) actor-centred institutionalism (ACI). While the basic causal model is based on North, I make use of aspects of ACI to provide a more detailed account of the dynamics of the policy formulation phase that arises from the interaction of the various actors in HE policy.

The core elements of the theoretical framework used for this study are presented in this chapter. I begin with North's model of institutional change (section 3.1) and then complement and specify it with respect to the topic under investigation with elements of ACI (section 3.2), as well as insights from the field of HE (section 3.3).[25]

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[25] An earlier version of this framework has been published in Witte (2004).

3.1   North's model of institutional change

3.1.1   The basic model

In his Nobel-prize[26] winning work "Institutions, institutional change and economic performance", Douglass North provides a comprehensive model of institutional change. Essentially, the model is made up of two interdependent relationships, between formal and informal constraints which together provide the institutional context, and between institutions and organisations (see Figure 3.1).[27]

Figure 3.1: North's model of institutional change
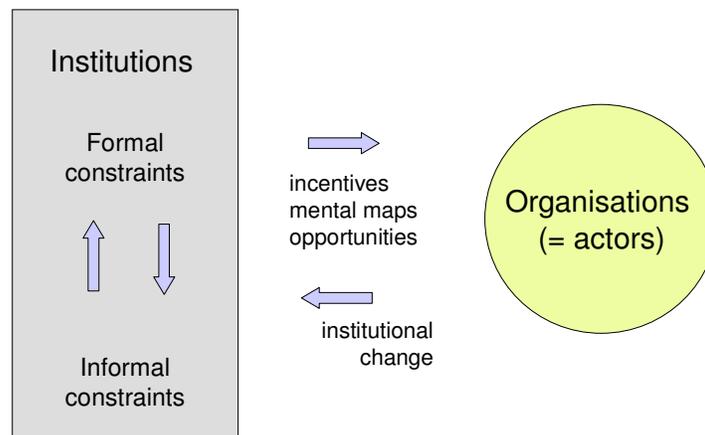
Adapted from Fiori (2002).

At the heart of the model is North's (1990: 3) concept of institutions:

> Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human action.

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[26]   Strictly speaking, the 'Nobel-Prize' in Economics is a prize funded by the Swedish National Bank in memory of Alfred Nobel.

[27]   The interpretation of North's model presented in this chapter owes much to the lucid analysis of Fiori (2002).

At first glance, this definition is very much in line with the rational-choice tradition, which analyses actors' strategic and utility-maximising behaviour within an institutional framework which constitutes the playing field as well as the 'rules of the game' for that interaction (see section 0). However, North goes far beyond the traditional boundaries of rational choice in acknowledging that

> institutions include any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction. Are institutions formal or informal? They can be either, and I am interested both in formal constraints—such as rules that human beings devise—and in informal constraints—such as conventions and codes of behaviour (ibid: 4).

FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONSTRAINTS. More precisely, formal constraints encompass constitutions, laws, regulations, political and juridical rules, economic rules such as property rights, and contracts (ibid: 36, 47); while informal constraints consist of "(1) extensions, elaborations, and modifications of formal rules, (2) socially sanctioned norms of behaviour, (3) internally enforced standards of conduct" and "conventions" (ibid: 40). "They come from socially transmitted information and *are part of the heritage that we call culture*" [emphasis added] (ibid: 36).

In line with this definition, North uses the terms 'informal' and 'cultural constraints' interchangeably (ibid: 6). In this study, I mainly use the term 'informal constraints'. North insists on the importance and centrality of informal, or cultural constraints for his model: "these cultural constraints not only connect the past with the present and future, but provide us with the key to explaining the path of institutional change" (ibid: 6). It is mainly because of the informal constraints that

> history matters. It matters not just because we can learn from the past, but because the present and the future are connected to the past by the continuity of a society's institutions. Today's and tomorrow's choices are shaped by the past (ibid: vii).

Therefore, North insists that though

> it is much easier to describe and be precise about the formal rules that societies devise than to describe and be precise about the informal ways in which human beings have structured human interaction, [and] (…) although they [informal constraints] defy, for the most part, neat specification and it is extremely difficult to develop unambiguous tests for their significance, they are important. (…) That the informal constraints are important in themselves (and not simply as appendages to formal rules) can be observed from the evidence that the same formal rules (...) imposed on different societies produce different outcomes (ibid: 36).

Following Boyd and Richerson (1985), North defines culture as the "transmission from one generation to the next, via teaching and imitation, of knowledge, values and other factors that influence behaviour" (North, 1990). He also speaks of a "cultural filter" that "provides continuity". By including cultural aspects such as behavioural norms and traditions in his definition of institutions, North effectively embraces elements of sociological institutionalism (March & Olsen, 1984; J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1983).

The relationship of formal and informal constraints is a central building block in North's model of institutional change. On the one hand, formal constraints can be considered as 'crystallisation' of informal constraints:

> the difference between informal and formal constraints is one of degree. Envision a continuum from taboos, customs, and traditions at one end to written constitutions at the other. The move, lengthy and uneven, from unwritten traditions and customs to written laws has been unidirectional as we have moved from less to more complex societies (North, 1990: 46).

On the other hand, as mentioned above, informal constraints can evolve as "extensions, elaborations, and modifications of formal rules". In other words, there is a two-way causality between these two parts of the institutional fabric: formal constraints can evolve from informal constraints, and vice versa.

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS. The second central interdependent relationship is the one between institutions and organisations, which North analytically distinguishes:

> A crucial distinction in this study is made between institutions and organisations. Like institutions, organisations provide a structure to human interaction. […] [However,] the emphasis in this study is on the institutions that are the underlying rules of the game and the focus on organisations (and their entrepreneurs) is primarily on their role as agents of institutional change; therefore the emphasis is on the interaction between institutions and organisations (ibid: 4-5).

Thus, while North acknowledges that organisations have a structural and an agency aspect to it, in order to "clearly differentiate (…) the rules from the players" (ibid: 4), he considers organisations in their role as actors. Concretely, "organisations include political bodies, economic bodies, and education bodies." To ensure consistency with actor-centred institutionalism and in line with the terminological conventions of new institutionalism, I refer to these organisational actors as 'actors' rather than as 'organisations', but denoting exactly the same thing: the agency aspect of HE organisations (see section 3.2 for a discussion of the concept). The interdependence between institutions and actors works as follows: "Both what organisations come into existence and how they evolve are

fundamentally influenced by the institutional framework. In turn they influence how the institutional framework evolves" (ibid: 5).

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. The dynamics of institutional change can now be explained as a combination of the interdependent relationships between informal and formal constraints on the one hand and institutions and organisations on the other. Institutions determine the "opportunities" (ibid: 7), "incentives" (ibid: 74) and "perceptions" or "mental models" (ibid: 8) of organisational actors. The latter in turn, change the institutional framework into which they are embedded by changing "the formal rules, the informal norms or the enforcement of either of these" (North, 1999). Informal and formal constraints continuously adjust to each other. North (1999) therefore concludes that "we can conceive of the process as a *circular flow*" [emphasis added] (…) which "has gone one ever since human beings began to shape their destiny". The one-way causality inherent in the models of inertia and critical junctures is thus replaced by a two-way causality (see Figure 3.1 above).[28]

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[28] Jepperson's conceptualisation of 'institutions' can be useful to elaborate and complement North's distinction of informal and formal constraints. According to Jepperson (1991: 144-5), "an institution represents a social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property; institutionalisation denotes the process of such attainment. By order or pattern, I refer, as conventional, to standardized interaction sequences. An institution is a social pattern that reveals a particular reproduction process. (...) Put another way: institutions are those social patterns that, when chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes. (...) That is, institutions are not reproduced by 'action' in this strict sense of collective intervention in a social convention. Rather, routine procedures support and sustain the pattern, furthering its reproduction— unless collective action blocks, or environmental shock disrupts, the reproductive process."

In line with this definition, some institutions "can be referred to as organisations, others not. Some may seem more 'cultural', others more 'structural'" (ibid: 144-5). Jepperson identifies "three primary carriers of institutionalisation: formal organisation, regimes, and culture" (ibid: 150). Regimes refer to "institutionalisation in some central authority system - that is, in explicitly codified rules and sanctions – without primary embodiment in a formal organisational apparatus" (ibid). Examples are the legal system or professions. "Institutionalisation can also be carried by 'culture': here simply those rules, procedures and goals without primary representation in formal organization, and without monitoring and sanctioning by some 'central' authority. These rules are, rather, customary or conventional in character. Institutionalizing in culture produces expectations about the properties, orientations, and behaviour of individuals, as constraining 'others' in the social environment. (…) Institutions can certainly have a complex embodiment: in both regime and culture, for example (citizenship)" (ibid: 150-151).

These reflections are very much in line with and complementary to North (1990). Of the three carriers of institutionalisation, 'culture' corresponds to what North calls 'informal constraints', while 'regime' and 'organisation' correspond to 'formal constraints'. Jepperson's definition of 'culture' as *those forms of consciousness with socially coordinating effects* [emphasis added]" throws light on the close link between informal constraints and mental maps: mental models that are shared by many turn into informal constraints and become part of the institutional framework (Denzau & North, 1994). 'Organisation' has a dual meaning; it can connote the 'institution' side (as used by Jepperson) and the 'action' side (as done by North). Those aspects of 'organisation' that connote the 'institution' side are subsumed by North under 'formal constraints', it is the rules, statutes and formal structures that constitute an organisational actor.

3.1.2   Gradual change

In his first presentation of the model, North uses the framework to provide an analytical argument for the prevalence of path dependence in the sense of inertia or persistence, i.e., to explain the prevalence of gradual change in institutional development. After all, the purpose of his 1990 book was to explain why there were no signs of convergence between the developing and developed economies despite the propositions of mainstream economic theory; and why to the contrary, the gap seemed to be increasing.

The first building block in explaining this lack of convergence requires a closer look at the relationship between organisations and institutions. The proposition is that while change is brought about by entrepreneurs in organisations, the degree of change they can affect is limited by the opportunities (for example, actors' relative bargaining power), incentives, as well as perceptions or 'mental models' created by the existing institutional framework. Actors' perceptions are influenced by the incomplete information they receive, which is in turn influenced by the institutional framework (see North, 1990: 8). Their subjective models are therefore not necessarily true models, and it is not guaranteed that they make use of their opportunities in their own best interest. In short, 'bounded rationality' can only bring about 'bounded innovation',[29] and adjustments of the existing institutional framework tend to be adjustments at the margin (ibid: 8, 101; see also section 3.2).

The second building block in explaining this lack of convergence is derived from the relationship between formal and informal constraints: the proposition that informal constraints are much harder to change than formal constraints, and that reform is mostly attempted through a reform of formal constraints such as laws.

> Although formal rules may change overnight as the result of political or judicial decisions, informal constraints embodied in customs, traditions and codes of conduct are much more impervious to deliberate policies. These cultural constraints not only connect the past with the present and the future, but provide us with a key to explaining the path of historical change (ibid: 6).

Once the formal constraints have been changed, a tension develops between formal and informal constraints. As the informal constraints are subject to a slower rate of change, they have the tendency to pull the economy/society back towards the previous equilibrium. Eventually, a "restructuring of the overall constraints" will take place "—in both directions—to produce a new equilibrium that is far less revolutionary" than what was originally intended (ibid: 91). Informal constraints thus play a crucial role in explaining inertia.

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[29]   See Weir (1992) for the concept of 'bounded innovation'.

North's model can not only be used to explain why change is likely to be gradual or marginal, but also to say something about the likely paths of change. In addition to simply increasing the exit costs, inherited institutions also determine the range of available exit paths. That is, the existing institutional web makes certain adaptations more likely than others. The reasons for inertia listed in the last section can enrich this analysis. Efforts at changing the current institutional fabric will be guided by mental maps and coloured by the policy legacies of the past (see section 2.5.1 above). Changes are easier to bring about in areas of social life that can be regulated by legal provision than by those ordered by unwritten codes of conduct. In the area of legal provision, attention needs to be paid to the fabric created by complementary as well as 'nested' rules and arrangements (see section 2.5.1 above) which imply that the intended effect of a change of rule might be changed by the interplay with other existing rules, and that it does not always suffice to change one rule only to bring about the desired effect.

3.1.3 Non-gradual change

While North uses his model to explain gradualism in his first book, it can also be used to account for non-gradual change. The gradualism exposed in his 1990 book rests on two propositions:

(1) informal constraints change slower than formal constraints;

(2) mental models are a close mirror of the institutional framework.

As Fiori (2002) rightly points out, the first proposition indirectly implies that "the more traditions and customs are weakened, the more some events (…) and some new formal constraints determine the direction of change". The reverse is also true: the more a society is shaped by culture and history, the less flexibly it can react to new political and economic challenges. This turning of the argument might not explain radical institutional change, but can explain why the rate of change can be higher in one society than in another. It will be interesting to explore this proposition when comparing different national responses to action line two of the Bologna declaration. For example, actors in the German HE system often resort to 'history' and 'culture' as arguments against change and their rate of change seems comparatively low.

A reconsideration of the second proposition requires a closer look at the idea of 'mental models'. This concept contained in North's 1990 book is further developed in an article with Denzau (Denzau & North, 1994) to account for

drastic changes.[30] Referring back to his 1990 definition of institutions, North states that

> mental models are the internal representations that individual cognitive systems create to interpret the environment; the institutions are the external (to the mind) mechanisms individuals create to structure and order the environment. (…) *Ideologies are the shared framework of mental models that groups of individuals possess* [emphasis added] that provide both an interpretation of the environment and a prescription as to how that environment should be structured. (…) Ideologies and institutions can then be viewed as classes of shared mental models. (…) Individuals with common cultural backgrounds and experiences" will therefore "share reasonably convergent mental models, ideologies, and institutions" (ibid: 3-4).

It is a bit confusing that North introduces a new term: 'ideologies'. The way he defines it however, is largely congruent with his definition of informal constraints. In my reading of Denzau and North, informal or cultural constraints are thus the shared mental models of a group of actors in a relevant institutional context. For drastic institutional change to occur, the informal constraints need to change. For the informal constraints to change, a concurrent restructuring of mental models of myriads of individual actors needs to take place, a so-called "representational redescription" (ibid: 22-23). Such a change of belief systems can be triggered by a sudden radical breakdown of formal constraints, the classical example for this being wars and revolutions, a possibility that North (1990: 89) explicitly mentions.

A possibility that North does not deal with explicitly but which is a logical extension of his model, is that a discontinuous change of belief system or paradigm could also be triggered by exposure to a different kind of institutional context. North developed his original theory to explain why convergence between developed and less-developed economies was less than expected. He did not deal with a set of countries that was (as) closely connected though common institutions and a common space of discourse (as the countries taking part in the Bologna process). He assumed that national actors' mental models would only be influenced by the respective national institutional context as the sole source of "common cultural backgrounds and experiences" (ibid: 3-4, see above) and according mental models. His assumption was fair for the countries he dealt with. However, making this assumption explicit is crucial as his explanation of system inertia rests on it. War and revolutions were the only events he mentioned that could break this inertia because they disrupt mental models and institutional

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[30] Fiori (2002), from a comparative analysis of the two works, concludes that the two 'visions of change'—gradual and non-gradual—put forward in the two works are not compatible. I think they are and do not see a contradiction between the two frameworks.

frameworks at the same time. "Representational redescription" through exposure to an institutional context other than the closed national one—especially through the increasing institutionalisation of the international sphere—is another important possibility that will be pursued further in section 3.1.6.

3.1.4 Application to national HE systems

We are now in a position to apply North's model to HE systems. Seen through the lens of North's new institutionalism, national HE systems appear as rich institutional fabrics made up of myriads of formal and informal constraints. In what follows, I also refer to these as formal and informal 'features', as sometimes I prefer to use a term that better captures the steering and enabling side as well. North probably uses the term 'constraints' because of his background in economic theory; he therefore chooses a term familiar to economists, who tend to think of institutions as side conditions for the utility-maximising behaviour of individuals exclusively. Conceptually, North does however include the *enabling* side of institutions by arguing that they provide the incentives, opportunities, *and* mental maps that guide actors' decisions. The neutral term 'features' seems well suited to capture both the restricting and the enabling side of institutions. I will however use the term 'constraints' when I want to highlight the constraining aspect of particular formal and informal features.

Within the network of formal and informal features that constitute the institutional fabric of a national HE system, degree structures themselves can be regarded as an institution interwoven with the other institutional features of the system. A range of organisational actors interact within this set of institutions and constantly bring about changes at the margin. Institutional change in HE is thus brought about by the actors of HE policy whose opportunities, incentives, and mental models are in turn shaped by the institutional context of the HE system in which they operate. Including all actors related to HE in the analysis would be beyond the scope of this study; the analysis will focus on the *key* actors in national HE policy. These engage in a negotiation process about the direction and scope of institutional change that requires the adjustment of informal as well as formal features. National debates over adaptations of national degree structures can thus be regarded as a political argument about *intended institutional change*. The model then reads as depicted in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: North's model applied to national HE systems
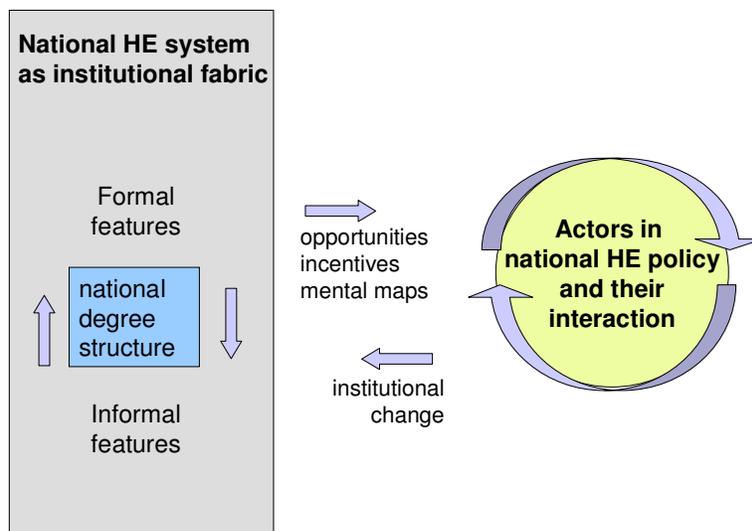
North's concept of institutions is well suited to grasp the nature of HE systems in which there are fluid transitions and blurred borders between formal and informal features: some aspects of the HE system are laid down in laws and constitutions; others in regulations, guidelines, and position papers; yet others in implicit contracts, unwritten codes of conduct, and normative and value orientations. In *empirical* terms, "the difference between informal and formal constraints is one of degree" (North, 1990: 46). *Analytically* however, North's concept helps to distinguish between the two. By confining the concept of 'culture' captured by 'informal constraints' to those aspects of human life not 'crystallised' in formal regulations, it draws attention to the fact that a large part of what is commonly referred to as 'HE culture' can actually be grasped in terms of the formal features of the HE system. For example, attitudes about the professed superiority of research over teaching are formalised in legal provisions ascribing different status to university and non-university HEIs as well as in differential funding regulations. Similarly, value judgements about what constitutes the level of maturity needed to commence university studies are laid down in laws about the length of schooling, the content and level of exit examinations, and the legal framework regulating access to HE. To grasp the

different traditions, values, and other cultural factors evoked in debates about adaptations of national degree structures, one can get very far with an analysis of the different regulatory frameworks of HE systems as most of these cultural, or informal, features are institutionalised in a very tangible sense in the fabric of national HE systems. The largest part of what is commonly referred to as cultural peculiarities of a specific HE system can be grasped on this basis. In what follows, I therefore use the term 'formal features' to denote that part of the institutional framework of HE laid down in laws, regulations, statutes and funding arrangements, including those cultural aspects of HE systems materialised in formal rules. For those—cultural—aspects of HE systems that defy any formal regulation even though they are deeply rooted as practices and attitudes, I use the term 'informal' constraints. Both formal and informal features are part of the institutional framework of HE systems. In section 0, I specify North's concept of institutions with respect to HE by proposing a set of relevant dimensions for the analysis of the interplay of formal and informal features within the HE system.

When applying North's model to the specificities of adaptations of national degree structures, it is more convenient to 'unfold' the cyclical interaction between actors and institutions and think of it as a phase model. This is done in Figure 3.3 which distinguishes the state of the investigated HE system at the time of the Bologna declaration and five years later, in 2004.

Figure 3.3: North's model 'unfolded'
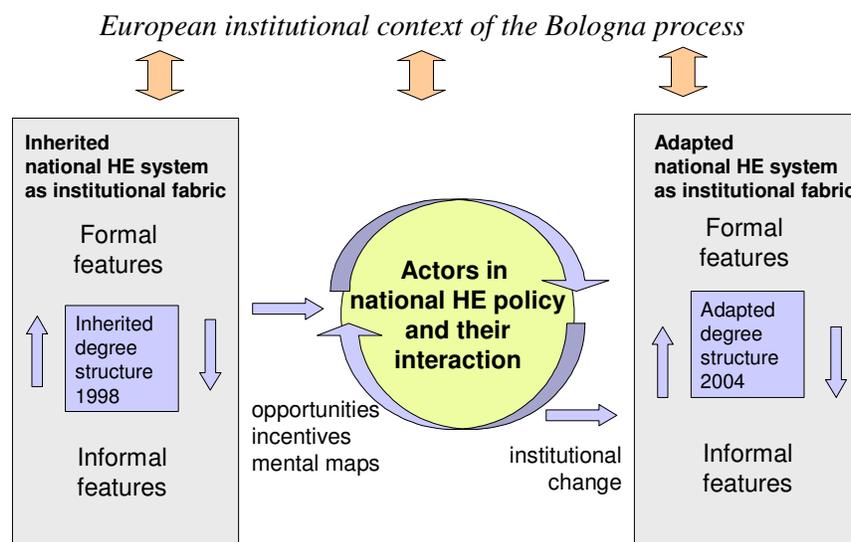
The figure can be read as follows: comparable to a change of world market prices in North's model that affects all countries equally but to which they respond differently (North, 1990: 101), the Bologna process can be seen as an external trigger for change that is received, reflected, and responded to differently in the respective signatory countries.[31] The inherited institutional fabric of the respective HE system provides the opportunities, incentives, and mental maps for actors in national HE policy to engage in the policy formation process regarding changes of degree structures. This policy formulation process is directed at institutional change and shapes the adaptations of national degree structures, always seen in the context of the respective HE system.

Though responses can be expected to vary, the general direction of reform efforts—and resulting institutional change—is influenced by the Bologna process and can be expected to lead from whatever inherited national degree structure to one characterised by two cycles.

3.1.5   Focus on policy change

North's original model is about institutional change whereas the focus of this study is on policy change. As I explained in section 2.2, implementation research teaches us that relatively long periods of about 10 years are needed before institutional change resulting from a new policy can ultimately be assessed (Sabatier, 1999a). With that in mind, I distinguish policy change from the actual change brought about by policy implementation and focus this study on policy change (see also Theisens, 2004 for a similar distinction), without denying that adjustments ultimately need to take place at both levels for institutional change to be sustainable.

In line with North's model, I understand both policy change and actual change as forms and aspects of institutional change since both require the adjustment of formal and informal features. For policy change, this derives directly from the nature of governance in today's European HE systems that I presented in section 2.3. There I argued that given the way policy formulation in modern HE systems takes place, national ministries in charge of HE cannot simply impose reforms. Instead, policy change always results from a process that involves the interaction of a range of actors, even though the extent to which they have an influence on actual policies varies. In this process, not only formal features of the HE system are adjusted (such as if a new HE Act is passed), but informal change is also brought about to the extent that actors' views, values, and

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[31]   This holds even if the motives for the ministers in charge of HE to—in the French case initiate and—sign the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations in the first place derived again to a large degree from the respective national contexts and reform pressure. Nevertheless, the declarations then constituted an extra trigger and the ensuing process unfolded its own dynamics.

paradigms change—what North calls their (shared) mental models (see section 3.1.3)— and adapt in the process. This study seeks to capture both these formal and informal changes at the level of national HE policy, as illustrated in Figure 3.4 (see also methodological chapter, sections 4.4.1.1 and 4.4.1.3).

Figure 3.4: North's model focused on policy change

European institutional context of the Bologna process
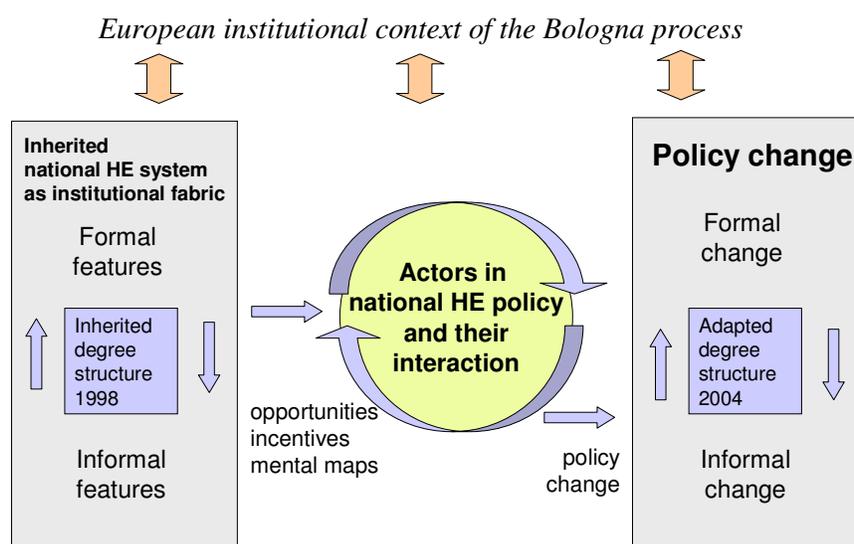
3.1.6 Integration of the international context

Though the Bologna process influences the direction of policy change, it is not clear *how much* the inherited national systems will change. If the interaction of the national institutional framework of HE and national actors in HE policy (see Figure 3.2) was all to be considered in the analysis, North's model would let us expect system inertia to prevail, i.e. little changes in the existing degree structures. As I have pointed out above, the expectation derived from North's basic model is for institutional—and policy—change to be slow, marginal and shaped by the formal and informal features of the inherited system.

However, the international context is crucial for adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process. As explained in section 3.1.3, North's model allows for a radical redescription of actors' mental models that leads to more than gradual change under certain circumstances. I hold that the

international dynamics emerging from the simultaneous reform processes going on in a great number of European HE systems—and the 'institutionalisation' of the international discourse about these reforms through the Bologna process— provide the conditions that render such radical redescription possible.[32] The expectation of system inertia is based on the assumption that actors' mental maps are influenced solely by their respective national institutional context. However, regarding the move to two-cycle degree structures in Europe, actors' motives and interests do not derive from the context of their own HE system exclusively, but are also influenced by the common international context created by the Bologna declaration and the ensuing Bologna process. Exposure to the European context may allow for mental models to develop that are different from those derived in the national context only.

The degree of institutionalisation of the European HE area is admittedly low, and definitely much lower than that of national HE systems. Critics have rightly pointed out that speaking of a "European HE system" has little to do with reality (Neave, 2003: 142-143). Nevertheless, the European HE area certainly has elements that fall under North's definition of 'institutions'. While the formal features are (still?) weak, informal features are being developed through the common space for European-level discourse created by the Bologna and Lisbon processes. Moreover, a handful of actors, such as the European Commission, the EUA, the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), play an increasingly important role in this process. The Bologna process itself is increasingly institutionalised through formalised follow-up procedures (see chapter 5 on Europe). It is fair to be open to the possibility that these institutional linkages in the European HE area and the associated discourse space might trigger the development of common mental maps. Change agents that oscillate between the national and international context, such as representatives of national-level interest groups and think tanks in HE, as well as students that have studied in more than one country, can be expected to be more open to two-cycle degree structures than those whose mental maps are restricted to their respective local or national contexts. This leads to the following preliminary hypothesis:

The more importantly the European context features in a national actor's mental map, the more likely he or she is to be in favour of adaptations of national degree structures that are compatible with the—perceived—emerging European consensus.

Aggregated to the system level, this implies that

the more shared mental models in an HE system are influenced by the international context, the more policy change takes place.

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[32] See Djelic and Quack (2003) for a theoretical framework of institutionalisation of the international sphere.

North's model can then be combined with Arthur's model of increasing returns and positive feedback to explain that a higher pace of convergence could result from the dynamic interaction of national- and international-level actors and institutional contexts than might be expected if the national-level policy formulation processes were regarded in isolation. The complex interaction of multiple national-level reforms and the international communication about these reforms, creates the kind of momentum featuring positive feedback mechanisms and increasing returns that may trigger the lock-in of a new developmental path (Arthur, 1994; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c; Pierson, 2000a) (see section2.5.2).

An additional argument linking North's model to the critical juncture-type of path dependence has been developed by Pierson (1996) in a historical institutionalist account of the development of the European Union. The basic story is that actors' actions, even if they begin as rational, self-conscious, utility-maximising actors, may have unintended and unanticipated consequences which successively transform their own initial positions and thereby create "lags" or "gaps in membership control" (ibid: 126), i.e., "significant divergences between the institutional and policy preferences of member states and the actual functioning of institutions and policies" (ibid: 131). It is the complexity of social systems, problems of overload, time constraints, scarcity of information, and interaction effects or feedback loops that allow for the possibility of unintended consequences. The argument is thus a logical extension of North's concept of bounded rationality to the interaction of national and international contexts, and very much in line with Mayntz' and Scharpf's idea of *Eigendynamik* (see section 2.5.2).

3.1.7   Lessons so far

To conclude, whether the observed degree of policy change in relation to adaptations of national degree structures will be gradual or more substantial can be expected to depend both (1) on the degree to which the *national* institutional context fosters willingness to change, and (2) on the weight assigned to the *international* context in the national debates about adaptations of national degree structures.

Three hypotheses can be developed from this analysis that follow from the causal relationships developed above (see section 3.4 for the full and final set).

(1)   The more the national institutional setting provides incentives for change, the more policy change takes place.

(2)   The more (shared) mental maps in a HE system are influenced by the international context, the more policy change takes place.

(3)   The less persistent informal and formal constraints of national HE systems, the more policy change takes place.

COMPLEMENTING NORTH. In this section, I adjusted and extended North's basic model in several ways. To arrive at a workable framework for the purpose of analysing adaptations of national degree structures in European HE systems, North's extended model needs to be complemented in two more ways:

(1) On the *actors' side*, we need a more precise account of the interaction of the various actors in HE policy in the policy formulation process on adaptations of national degree structures, i.e. the circle "actors in HE policy" needs a life of its own. Mayntz' and Scharpf's actor-centred institutionalism shall be used to fill this gap.

(2) On the *institutional side*, we need a richer and more grounded account of the institutional fabric that makes up for the different national HE systems, by specifying the institutional dimensions that provide relevant formal and informal features. The framework for such analysis will draw on insights from the field of HE.

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 address these two remaining aspects.

3.2   Actor-centred institutionalism

North (1991) and Denzau & North (1994) provide an elegant framework for the analysis of policy change as a process emerging from the interaction of organisational actors with the institutional framework in which they are embedded. While their contribution concentrates on the relationship of actors and institutions, they do not say much about the relationship of actors among themselves and their interaction in the process leading towards policy change. It is clear however that the latter needs to be part the analysis of adaptations of national degree structures, because no single actor in HE policy can impose his political will on the system. The framework of actor-centred institutionalism (ACI) will be used to fill this gap.

ACI is an interaction-oriented approach for policy research developed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf from the *Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung* in Cologne (MPIfG) first presented in Mayntz & Scharpf (1995c) and further developed and specified in game-theoretic terms by Scharpf (1997). It is a framework of relatively general categories specifically developed for and grounded in[33] the analysis of policy processes and governance in socio-political subsystems of a semi-public nature; such as health, telecommunication, labour relations, research, and education (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c). ACI constitutes one of the most convincing recent advances among the theoretical approaches to policy analysis and has already been applied to the study of

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[33]   In the introduction of Benz, Scharpf & Zintl (1992), the authors explain how they developed their concepts on multi-level governance through inductive construction from case study material.

different aspects of the German HE and research system (Hohn & Schimank, 1990; Schimank, 1995).

North's approach and ACI are consistent and complementary; consistent in that both frameworks include actors and institutions, and both adhere to a model of bounded rationality regarding actors' orientations as influenced but not wholly determined by the institutional context (Mayntz, 1997); and complementary in that while North focuses on institutions, ACI has more to say about the actor side. ACI can therefore be used in several ways to put flesh on the bones of North's model and complement North's formal theory of institutional change with a substantial theory[34] of policy formulation in public and semi-public sectors.

First, fully in line with the basic arguments presented in section 2.3, ACI provides an explicit justification for approaching the policy formulation processes on adaptations of national degree structures through the interaction of key actors in national HE policy. Second, the approach provides a theoretical justification for treating organisations and other social entities as actors. Third, it further develops the concept of 'bounded rationality' that characterises these actors. Fourth, it provides a complementary perspective on the three ways—opportunities, incentives and mental maps—in which institutions influence actors according to North. The way in which Scharpf conceptualises these three factors—capabilities, preferences and perceptions—helps in operationalising the concepts for empirical analysis. Finally, ACI provides the concepts of 'actor constellations and 'modes of interaction', which can be used to analyse the complexity of political interaction in the policy formulation phase. Each of these points shall now be elaborated in turn.

3.2.1 A framework for the study of actor interaction in policy formulation

North's model operates at a high level of abstraction; it could be applied to many spheres in social and economic life, and does not explicitly deal with political systems. ACI bridges the gap between North's general model and the analysis of HE policy by providing a framework for understanding contemporary governance in public and semi-public sectors. The approach constitutes a theoretical response to the fact highlighted in section 2.3 that governance in these sectors is no longer adequately conceptualised by a clear dichotomy between the steering state and the society to be steered, and that top-down planning models treating 'the state' as a unitary actor are no longer adequate (Mayntz, 1998; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c). Not only are both the steering state and the object of steering more adequately modelled as a *plurality* of actors, but the distinction between the two has become blurred altogether as state, public, semi-public, as well as private actors all take part in and shape the 'governance' of these sectors.

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[34]   For a distinction of formal and substantial theory, see Glaser & Strauss (1967).

As Scharpf (1997: 178) stresses, "in the process of policy formation, at any rate, hierarchical direction has always been a poorly fitting concept, even within the strictly hierarchical structures of ministerial organisation." ACI therefore replaces the dichotomy of the 'governor' and the 'governed' by an analysis of actors' interaction in policy networks[35] characterised by multiple modes of interaction. This perspective adequately captures both the nature of national HE systems and the international context for this reform, and is thus particularly suited for the study of adaptations of national degree structures.

Moreover, multi-actor governance and path dependence are closely linked: as Scharpf (2000a: 11) notes, multi-actor systems with high consensus requirements are more prone to lock-in effects than other political systems. "The adoption of policy changes will be more difficult in multiple-actor than in single-actor constellations" and path dependence is therefore more likely to occur. In this context, Scharpf also refers to the concept of 'policy legacies' from Weir and Skocpol (1985: 249) i.e., "existing policies and practices, and expectations based on them": "Even though policy legacies are the product of past political choices, they are not necessarily at the disposition of present policy makers." Similar policy changes "may constitute problems differing in nature or in severity, depending on the accidental goodness-of-fit between these changes and existing national policy legacies" (Scharpf, 2000: 6). The in-depth discussion of multi-level, multi-actor governance presented in section 2.3 shall not be repeated here.

3.2.2   Treating organisations as actors

Mayntz and Scharpf also provide an explicit theoretical justification why organisations, though composed of a multitude of individuals, can be regarded as actors for the purpose of policy analysis (Scharpf, 1997)—a justification that North does not provide, though he makes use of the concept (see section 3.1.1). Their argument goes as follows: in the political process, relevant actors typically work within the confines of an institutional framework that not only defines the competencies and resources but also filters the information they receive and shapes their cognitive and normative orientations so that they act on behalf of their organisations. As a result, they "are typically acting in the interest, and from the perspective, of larger units, rather than for themselves" (ibid: 12). This makes it possible to "treat a limited number of large units as composite (…) actors with relatively cohesive action orientations and relatively potent action resources" (ibid: 12). As a simplifying assumption and following Lindenberg's principle of "declining levels of abstraction" (Lindenberg 1991 in Scharpf 1997: 62), individual

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[35] Other frameworks for network analysis, such as Knoke (1990) or Laumann & Knoke (1987) and the advocacy-coalitions framework of Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1993; 1999) follow a similar approach.

actors' preferences and perceptions are therefore equated with those implied by their organisational affiliation as long as empirical findings do not call for a different treatment. Nevertheless, the researcher must stay open to the *possibility* that an individual within an organisation has a personal impact that cannot be explained by the respective institutional circumstances. In this case, the analysis has to take into account the individual level (see concluding reflections in section 12.2.2).

3.2.3 Bounded rationality

Like North, ACI assumes that actors' rationality is bounded. However, it provides a more explicit justification and positioning of this approach as a compromise between neoclassical economics and cultural anthropology/mainstream sociology (see also section 2.4.4). While the parsimony of each approach simplifies analysis by lowering degrees of freedom, neither can claim to provide a realistic model of actor perception and behaviour in the political field: political actors do not act on the basis of full information, pure self-interest, and zero transaction costs as assumed by neoclassical economics; and their cognitive orientations and behaviour are *not fully* determined by the institutional framework within which they operate as assumed by cultural anthropology and mainstream sociology. Interestingly, by acknowledging the role of both rational-strategic and cultural-institutional elements in actors' preferences and perceptions, ACI is more than just a mixture of the two extreme positions: instead, the approach allows for such as thing as 'free will'—albeit within the confines of "culturally shaped and socially constructed beliefs", "clearly structured responsibilities and competencies", and with "assigned resources that can be used for specific purposes only" (Scharpf 1997: 21). The higher degree of realism provided by ACI does however come at the cost of a higher degree of complexity: actor behaviour in a specific situation cannot simply be deduced from assumptions but has to be evaluated in a particular empirical situation.

3.2.4 Actor characteristics: capabilities, perceptions and preferences

Similar to North, ACI acknowledges the importance of institutions and actors in explaining political outcomes, and the way this influence is conceptualised is fully compatible. The line of vision however, is reversed. In North's thinking, institutions influence actors through opportunities, incentives and mental maps. According to Scharpf (2000a: 3), "actors and their interacting choices, rather than institutions, are the proximate causes of policy responses whereas institutional conditions, to the extent that they are able to influence actor choices, are conceptualised as remote causes." ACI's perspective is thus how actors are

influenced by institutions, rather than how institutions influence actors. In Scharpf's (1997: 43) terms, "actors are characterised by specific capabilities, specific perceptions, and specific preferences". Both North's and Scharpf's sets of categories—while not synonymic—correspond nearly one-to-one: opportunities shape capabilities, mental maps guide perceptions, and incentives trigger preferences (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Actor characteristics in North and Scharpf
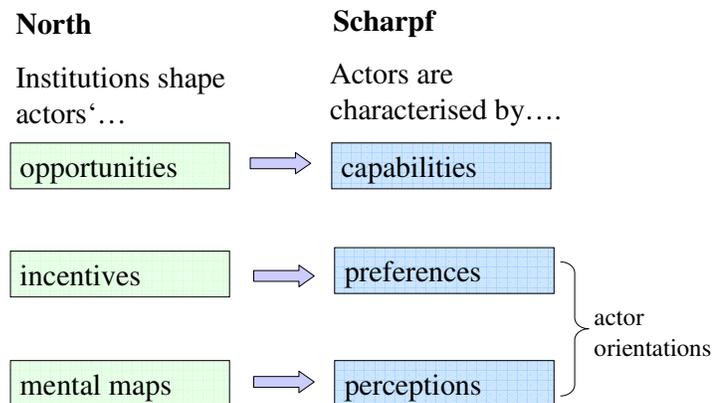
Despite this unusually high degree of correspondence between the two independent frameworks, methodologically I have to choose one of the two consistent approaches. I have opted for using Scharpf's concepts, which provide clearer definitions and a higher degree of operationalisation than North and are therefore better suited for use in the empirical analysis. To analyse the contribution of actors and their interaction to policy change, I focus on actors' capabilities, preferences, and perceptions, while taking into account how they are influenced by the institutional framework.

In contrast to North who distinguishes opportunities, incentives, and mental maps at the same level of analysis, Scharpf makes a more basic distinction between actor capabilities on one hand and actor orientations on the other. While orientations circumscribe an actor's position towards a certain policy issue, capabilities determine the scope for realising this position. Scharpf differentiates actor orientations further into perceptions and preferences. Preferences are the most finely-grained concept, differentiated into types (see Figure 3.6). I define and discuss each of the concepts in turn.

Figure 3.6: Actor characteristics in Scharpf's framework
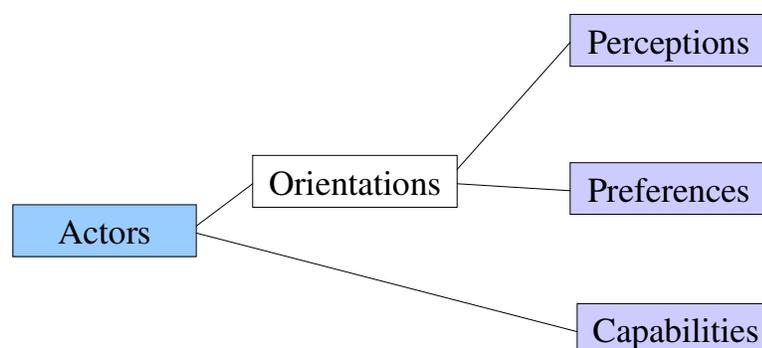
CAPABILITIES. The concept of capabilities denotes

> all action resources that allow an actor to influence an outcome in certain respects and to a certain degree. (…) What matters most in the context of policy research (…) are the *action resources that are created by institutional rules defining competencies and granting or limiting rights of participation, of veto, or of autonomous decision* in certain aspects of a given policy process [emphasis added] (Scharpf 1997: 43).

In other words, the capability concept refers to the competencies and roles of actors as defined by laws, statutes, and inherited relationships as well as their financial and personnel resources. Importantly, it is not the general capabilities of an actor that are of interest but those relevant to the issue at hand.

ACTOR ORIENTATIONS include perceptions and preferences. Taken together, they "refer to the desirable or undesirable nature of the status quo, to the causes of a perceived problem, to the efficacy and desirability of perceived courses of action, and to the outcomes associated with these" (Scharpf 1997: 43-44). Like capabilities, actor orientations are influenced by the institutional framework; they can be relatively stable or change in the course of the policy process.

Perceptions. Equivalent to North's concept of *personal* mental maps, Scharpf uses the concept of perceptions to denote actors' cognitive orientations i.e., it denotes the subjective perceptions of reality—including both facts and causal relationships—that may, but need not be correct (see methodological chapter, section 4.2.2 for how I operationalise the concept for the purpose of this study).

Scharpf provides some methodological considerations that are extremely useful and directly applicable to this study. On the basis of his experience, he suggests that it is fair to proceed on the basis of the

> working hypothesis that actors' perceptions of directly observable facts will be empirically correct and that their hypotheses about what they cannot observe as well as about causal linkages will be shaped by theories prevailing at the particular time and in the particular institutional setting (Scharpf 1997: 62).

In other words, the *shared* perceptions of actors in the respective context can be taken as a starting point for the identification of actors' *individual* perceptions. Moreover, Scharpf has found that shared perceptions are generally well documented in the media and accessible reports:

> Generally, the data that can be obtained relatively easily from public records and qualified newspaper reports correspond remarkably well with inside information that could only be gained through access to operative documents, confidential interviews, and participant observation (ibid: 63).

This finding eases empirical work because it implies that I can build a reasonably accurate picture of actors' perceptions from document analysis. Interviews are only needed to complement, triangulate, or deepen the picture gained from document analysis.

Preferences. Scharpf distinguishes four aspects of preferences: interests, norms, identities, and interaction orientations. The term 'interests' is used as a short-cut for pure self-interest, such as "organisational survival, autonomy, and growth" (ibid: 64). 'Norms' or 'normative role orientations' refer to preferences derived from organisational goals and missions, but also from the normative limitations defined by the purpose of an organisation. Again, a relevant methodological consideration is that both interest- and norms-related preferences are 'quasi-objective' in that they can be immediately derived from the institutional setting and are therefore easy to identify empirically. 'Identity-related preferences' are more sophisticated; they refer to the *specific* interests and norms that a particular actor chooses on the basis of its 'corporate identity' or 'culture'. Last but not least, 'interaction orientations' are *relationally* defined preferences. They refer to the immediate satisfaction—or dissatisfaction—derived from a particular behaviour vis-à-vis other actors and from the payoffs *they* receive. For the purpose of this study, it suffices to be principally aware of the different facets; analysing all four of the key actors in four HE systems would be beyond the scope of the study. Moreover, 'pure self-interest' and 'normative role orientations' are often virtually impossible to disentangle in practice as actors

clothe even their own pure-self interest in normative arguments and often perceive it that way as well.[36] In the political field, self-interest and normative orientations are mostly intertwined anyway as the purposes and 'missions' of most actors in HE policy are normative in character. In the empirical analysis, I use the terms 'motives and interests' loosely to refer to preferences based on both self-interest and norms, as well as a mixture of the two. I will however differentiate between 'interests and motives' (both referring to the causal basis of motivation) and 'goals' (referring to teleological motivations).

Having dealt with the different aspects that circumscribe a political actor—capabilities, perceptions and preferences—I now turn to the relationship and interaction between different actors in the policy formulation process.

3.2.5   Actor constellations and modes of interaction

North's model does not say much beyond the point that actors' opportunities, incentives, and mental maps are identified: the rest is bargaining among organisational actors. ACI provides a more explicit analytical toolkit for actor interaction in the policy process: the concepts of 'actor constellations' and 'modes of interaction'. Both are shaped by institutional rules and thus implicit in North's model, especially in the category of 'opportunities'. However, North does not develop these implications as fully as ACI.

ACTOR CONSTELLATIONS are the full picture that emerges if the perceptions, preferences and capabilities of individual actors are taken together. They

> are meant to represent what we know of a set of actors that are actually involved in particular policy interactions—their capabilities […], their perceptions and evaluations of the outcomes available […], and the degree to which their payoff aspirations are compatible or incompatible with one another. The constellation thus describes the *level of potential conflict* [emphasis added] involved in a given interaction (Scharpf, 1997: 72)

with respect to a certain issue.

MODES OF INTERACTION. While the actor constellation depicts the *static* picture of actors' relations regarding a proposed policy, the mode of interaction is the next step, specifying how "that conflict is going to be resolved—through unilateral action, negotiation, voting, or hierarchical determination" (Scharpf, 1998: 72) i.e.,

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[36]   For example, *Fachhochschulen,* when lobbying for the right to grant Masters degrees, will argue that this is in the common interest as it makes the HE system more flexible and diverse. This argument might be true *as well as* in their own pure self-interest.

it is concerned with the *dynamics* of actor interaction (see section 2.3.3 for an application to European policy making).

The distinction between actor constellations and modes of interaction is analytical—in real life, they are of course intertwined.[37] By distinguishing four basic modes of interaction, Scharpf draws attention to the fact that most governance systems today allow for several ways of conflict resolution in addition to hierarchical decision-making. Of course, the four modes are but stylised types; in reality there are many shades of grey in between. Moreover, the interaction modes unfold a different effect depending on the institutional setting in which they are exercised. Therefore, a procedural and a structural dimension are distinguished. For example, HE policy is frequently characterised by 'negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy' (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c), i.e., though government has the formal authority to impose a certain policy on the HE sector, it chooses to negotiate a consensus. Such behaviour is likely in the HE sector because actors have a lot of scope for evasive behaviour and governments are highly dependent on their co-operation. Actors' knowledge that hierarchical determination is the ultimate fall-back option increases the likelihood that a consensus will be found.

Scharpf's modes of interaction are "modular explanations" (ibid: 29): instead of classifying entire political systems or subsystems, he provides an analytical toolkit at a lower level which makes the framework well suited for the comparison of the policy formation process regarding tiered degree structures in different European HE systems. I expect these processes to be characterised by a combination of different interaction modes. An overall classification of entire HE systems would not be very helpful in this regard. In the following, I explain those interaction modes which have potential relevance for the national case studies, and the institutional setting they require.

Unilateral action is the least demanding form of social interaction institutionally as it requires virtually no institutional framework. Unilateral action can take place within minimal institutions or even in anarchic fields, completely

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[37] It is inspired by game theory: 'Actor constellation' is the verbal equivalent of the information that could be contained in a two-by-two matrix in a one-dimensional game with two players. In a more complex game with several actors such as adaptations of national degree structures, neither graphical depiction in a matrix nor formal game-theoretic analysis is possible, but it still helps to distinguish the interest conflict as such from the way it is politically dealt with. In standard game theory, only one interaction mode—unilateral, un-coordinated action—is considered. Scharpf however extends the 'tool kit' to allow for other, institutionally more demanding, interaction modes and shows how this changes the outcome of the games. In other words, Scharpf adopts the pattern of thought from game theory but extends it to make it suitable for the analysis of political systems.

institution-free contexts. I will not go into depth as both settings rarely occur in national HE policy.[38]

Negotiation is a more institutionally demanding interaction mode, the existence of a network being the minimal institutional requirement.[39] Regimes[40] and joint-decision systems provide even better conditions, and majoritarian or hierarchical settings render negotiation highly effective. Joint-decision systems and majoritarian or hierarchical settings are most relevant in the context of this study. *Joint-decision systems* are compulsory negotiation systems defined as "constellations in which parties are either physically or legally unable to reach their purposes through unilateral action and in which joint action depends on the nearly unanimous agreement of all parties involved" (ibid: 143). Such constellations can emerge from "functional interdependence", but also from institutionalised settings stipulating that "certain actions be undertaken only on the basis of negotiated agreement or unanimous vote" (ibid: 143). Once an agreement has been reached in a joint-decision system, it becomes binding and can only be changed by renegotiation. Therefore, joint-decision systems tend to lead into the "joint-decision trap". Examples are German federalism and the European Union. *Majoritarian or hierarchic institutions* render negotiation

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[38] As I explained in section 2.3.3, this is different at European level. **Minimal institutions** are a bit more demanding than anarchic fields as they require at least property rights, criminal and civil law to be in place. This is equivalent to actors having an effective veto right so that no actor can be made worse off as compared to the status quo (or some minimum level). Network-like relationships or procedural veto-positions can have this effect. Such minimum levels of institutions are required for the functioning of neoclassical economics. Within minimal institutions, *negative coordination* becomes possible: Different from mutual adjustment, actors cannot inflict unlimited damage upon each other. They may adjust to each other to safeguard their own interest but do not actively look for common solutions. The effect of negative coordination is a "rapidly shrinking policy space and increasing immobilism as the cumulation of vetoes rules out more and more attempts to depart from the status quo"(Scharpf 1997: 114).

[39] Scharpf defines **networks** as "voluntary negotiation systems in which parties are free to choose between negotiations and unilateral action" (ibid: 143), created by "semi-permanent relations of resource exchange and mutual support" (ibid: 136). Compared to minimal institutions, network relationships ease binding agreements by enhancing the "visibility of transactions" and introducing a "shadow of the future" (ibid: 137). They can be interpreted both as "social capital" or as "opportunity and power structures". Following Emerson (1962), power can be conceptualised "as an asymmetrical exchange relationship in which B's dependence on A is defined by both the importance of the resources or services provided by A and their non-availability from alternative sources" (ibid: 139). Obviously, networks can create both mutual and unilateral dependence relationships.

[40] Different from networks, **regimes** are "purposefully created normative frameworks governing negotiations among a formally specified set of actors that have explicitly undertaken to respect certain interest positions of other parties, to pursue certain substantive goals, and to follow certain procedures in their future interactions" (ibid: 141). Like networks, regimes "will not usually eliminate the capacity for unilateral action" (ibid: 143).

highly effective by constituting the permanent threat of hierarchical direction in case no agreement is reached and thus creating a strong incentive to reach agreement.

> The implication is therefore not only that negotiations that are embedded in a hierarchical structure are more likely to lead to agreement than freestanding negotiations would be under otherwise but also that these negotiations will be systematically influenced by the anticipation of a potential decision of the minister [in case of a bureaucracy]. (…) Thus by the virtue of the dual mechanisms of 'anticipated reactions' and 'the fleet in being', the policy influence of a hierarchical authority structure reaches much farther than hierarchical coordination, in the narrower sense of a specific mode of interaction, ever could (ibid: 200).

Such 'negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy' is typical of HE systems and I therefore expect this concept to play an important role in the empirical part.

Majority vote comes into play when the number of actors involved is too many to allow for negotiation. It is the typical interaction mode in majoritarian democracies, and can help to reach collectively binding agreements even if they are against the interests of some of the actors. Due to this property, majority vote raises particular questions of legitimacy.[41] The ***Westminster model of competitive democracy*** is the typical institutional setting for majority vote and precisely set up to control "the exercise of hierarchical government power" (ibid: 183). Not all modern democracies are based on majority vote, however. ***Negotiated or consociational democracies*** can be found in conditions in which majority vote would not generate the necessary legitimacy, such as in societies with strong class, religious, ideological or ethnic-linguistic cleavages. The Netherlands has been characterised by this concept. If all constituencies are represented and negotiators indeed represent the interests of their constituencies, the system can yield favourable outcomes from a welfare-theoretic perspective. Most democratic systems combine majority vote with some forms of negotiation, the German political system is an example. Specifically, Germany can be described as ***divided government,*** a term referring to "constitutional arrangements in which government is formally divided among several institutions whose members are separately accountable to the same constituency, or parts of it" (ibid: 191). Formally, divided government can be described as a joint-decision system (see above). The problem with this sort of arrangement is that it fosters competitive interaction orientations to a point that all kinds of issues are transformed into

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[41] Scharpf concludes that in practice, "general elections (…) can rarely be considered as a mode of arriving at collectively binding decisions but rather as institutional arrangements for the legitimation and control of hierarchical government authority" (ibid: 171).

zero-sum gains. "The most likely outcome is then political immobilism" (ibid: 193).[42]

Hierarchical direction. The last of the four major interaction modes "is defined as a mode of interaction in which ego is able to specify alter's choices or, more precisely, some of alter's decision premises" (ibid: 172). This ability may rest on threat and rewards or legitimate hierarchical authority. In spite of the existence of general elections, hierarchical direction is still the main interaction mode by which "decisions of 'the state' are imposed on the citizen" (ibid: 171).[43] Hierarchical authority structures, like state and bureaucratic hierarchies, are typical institutional settings for the exercise of hierarchical direction. Not all states are fully capable of hierarchical direction, however. This phenomenon is circumscribed by the concept of the *negotiating state*, a setting in which "the state is itself party to negotiations, rather than a third party setting the stage for and intervening in negotiations between societal groups" (ibid: 201). The latter is typical of corporatist countries such as Germany, which Scharpf describes as

> a 'semi-sovereign state' in which corporatist associations are well organised and powerful and federal legislation is fettered by high consensus requirements among government coalitions and between federal majorities and *Länder* governments and where, moreover, the central government does not have its own administrative infrastructure in most policy areas but must rely on implementation by *Länder* administration, which it cannot directly control (ibid: 203).

This completes the overview of interaction modes and institutional settings in the policy process. They draw attention to the fact that policy change in the context of national degree structure adaptations not only depends on actors' perceptions, preferences, and the power constellations between them, but also on the way these are 'played out' in the ensuing political game.

3.2.6 Lessons so far

To take stock, I have now developed one of the two components complementing North's model of institutional change by developing a more precise understanding of the actor side in the dialectical relationship between institutions

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[42] This leads Scharpf to the drastic conclusion that "negotiations under conditions of divided government are normatively unattractive both from a welfare-theoretic and a democratic-theoretic perspective" (ibid: 193).

[43] From a normative point of view, hierarchical direction is highly ambivalent: "it offers the potential to co-ordinate policy choices from an inclusive, welfare-maximising perspective" (ibid: 172), though it does so on the basis of minimal legitimacy.

and actors. Key concepts drawn from ACI are the 'actor constellation' and 'actor interaction'; Figure 3.7 depicts the combined framework.

Figure 3.7: Combining North and Scharpf into one framework

European institutional context of the Bologna process
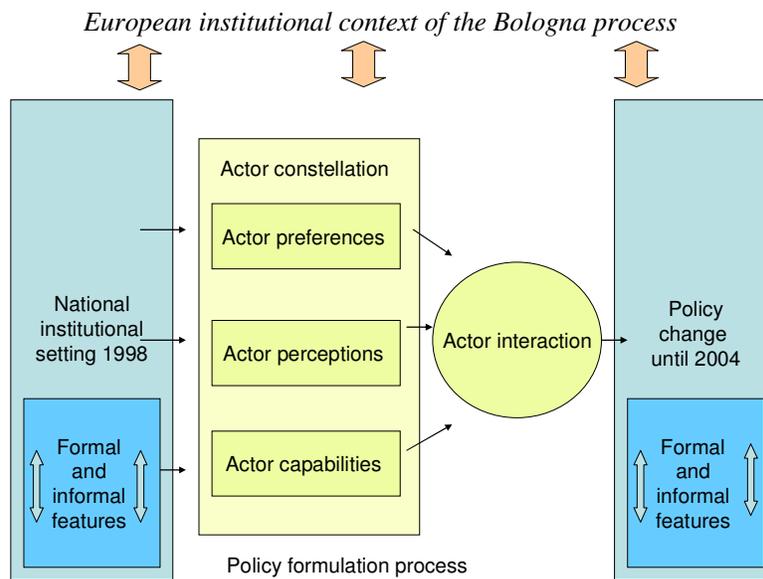
Given the decision to use Scharpf's terminology—actor preferences, perceptions and capabilities—in place of North's incentives, mental maps, and opportunities, the hypotheses proposed at the end of section (3.1.7) can be rephrased as follows:

(I)   The more the national institutional setting supports actor preferences for change, the more policy change takes place.

(II) The more actor perceptions in a HE system are influenced by the international context, the more policy change takes place.

(III) The less persistent informal and formal constraints of national HE systems, the more policy change takes place.

Based on the discussion of capabilities and interaction modes in the two previous sections, a fourth hypothesis can be put forward:

(IV) The stronger the capabilities of the national ministries response for HE in the respective HE system, the more policy change takes place.

Admittedly, hypothesis IV captures only one limited aspect of the complex framework of ACI, but one that I expect to be highly relevant for the topic of this thesis.

I now turn to the last step on the way towards a full framework for this study: the need to break down North's general concept of institutions to the HE sector. Drawing on the literature in HE research, I will operationalise the HE system as a set of institutions.

The attentive reader will note that the building blocks of the theoretical framework descend in level of abstraction: North's model can be regarded as a macro-level theory of institutional change, ACI is located at the meso-level of policy making in semi-public sectors, and the next step will be to bridge the remaining gap to the HE field. Their different levels of generality notwithstanding, all three building blocks are a necessary part of my theoretical framework. In this regard, I follow Schimank (2002b), who argues that frameworks at different levels of abstraction can be called "theories" and there should be no status hierarchy involved. To the contrary, a densely-built web of concepts from different levels of reduction ensures that the distance between theory and empirics is adequately bridged and thus improves the adequacy of the overall framework.

3.3   The institutional fabric of national HE systems

The conceptualisation of convergence in section 2.1 and the review of the new institutionalist literature on path dependence in section 2.5 provide strong arguments for analysing the changes in national degree structures induced by the Bologna process in the broader context of the HE systems in which they are embedded. Path dependence theory also provides clues of what to look for: how formal and informal features work together, mirror and influence each other; the ways in which complementary institutions and nested rules reinforce the status quo; the important role of intermediary or buffer institutions in shaping paths of change; and the way policy legacies colour the political debate about the course of action. What the new institutionalist literature—including North and Scharpf— cannot provide however, is a set of concepts or categories for the analysis of the particular institutional fabric of HE systems. As stated above, new institutionalist analyses typically deal with broader issues of socio-economic development and rarely with HE. Therefore, an institutionalist conceptualisation of the HE system has to come from the field of HE research.

In comparative HE research, there is a tradition of comparing HE systems along a range of key dimensions. These include different issues such as HE steering or governance models, the degree of university autonomy, university organisation and management, HE funding and tuition fees, different aspects of diversity (such as types of institutions or types of programmes), access, degree

structure and length, quality assurance, the relationship between HE and the labour market, inclusiveness versus exclusiveness of the system, mass versus elite education, internationalisation, and many more. At the risk of oversimplification, two main strands of literature can be distinguished in this field: a predominantly political-economic strand focusing on issues of HE steering, such as governance and finance (Becher & Kogan, 1979; Goedegebuure et al., 1993; Goedegebuure & Van Vught, 1994; Huisman, Maassen, & Neave, 2001; Neave & Van Vught, 1991, 1994; Schimank, 2002a; Van Vught, 1994, 1989; Walford, 1991) and a more sociological strand dealing with structural features of the HE system (Birnbaum, 1983; Davies, 1992; Halsey & Trow, 1971; Kyvik, 2002; Neave, 1989; Teichler, 1988b, 1988c, 1990, 1993, 2001; Teichler, Hartung, & Nuthmann, 1980; Trow, 1974, 1979, 1995).

THE SEVEN DIMENSIONS. I distinguish six institutional dimensions of HE systems that are closely intertwined with the institution of the **national degree structure**, i.e., levels, types, and titles of degrees (see Figure 3.8).[44]

(1) **institutional types**: i.e., the number of institutional types and the dispersion of HEIs across these types, their nature, tasks and relationship, including status and funding issues, the degrees they are allowed to grant, as well as the way the functions of education versus training and of elite versus mass education are distributed.

(2) **curricular governance**: i.e., the way responsibility and control of curricula, degree programmes and degrees is distributed in the system, the extent of curricular diversity deemed appropriate, and systems for the national coordination of programme supply.

(3) **curricula**: i.e., predominant goals of HE and concomitant ways of structuring and organising HE programmes such as the balancing of breadth versus depth, facts versus methodology, student freedom versus guidance, research- versus labour-market orientation, the length of studies and the enforcement of time limits.

(4) **access**: i.e., the percentage of school leavers qualifying for and admitted to HE, and the way the transition from school to HE and from the undergraduate to the graduate level is organised and regulated, again with reference to the nexus of elite versus mass education.

(5) **transition to employment**: i.e. the relationship between HE and the employment system including conceptions of employability, professional entry regulations and recruitment practices of both the public and private sector, and the permeability between HE and work.

(6) Finally, **funding**: i.e., spending on HE (not research), the way different types of HEIs are funded, and tuition fees and student support with particular

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[44] Including the national degree structure, this makes a total of seven dimensions.

attention to budget constraints and resulting efficiency-increasing and cost-cutting efforts in HE.

Figure 3.8: Institutional dimensions of national HE systems
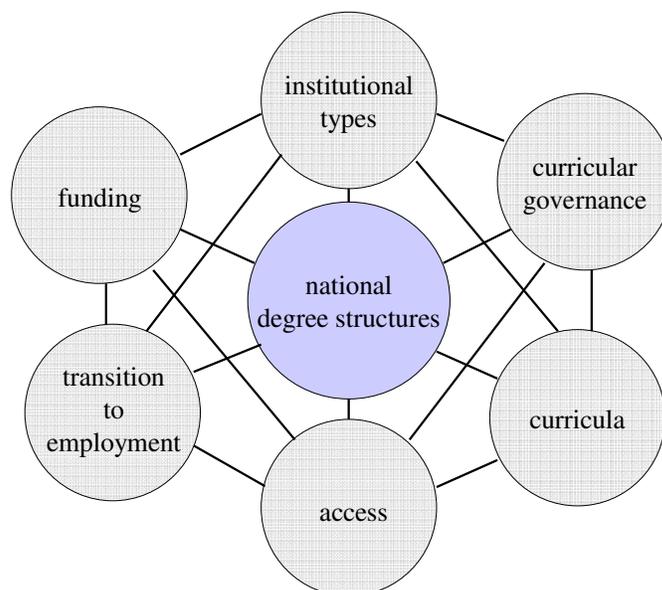
FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES IN THE SEVEN DIMENSIONS. Each dimension includes formal and informal features: While **degree structures** are laid down in HE laws and institutional statutes, they are at the same time a reflection of widely-shared perceptions of what it takes to assume a certain role in society or perform a certain profession. Degree titles convey a certain status that is peculiar to the respective national context—the British Masters having a different connotation from the German *Diplom* or the Dutch *doctorandus.* The system of **curricular governance** laid down in laws and statutes is also a reflection of normative judgements about the intended degree of institutional autonomy and the tolerable degree of institutional as well as programme diversity resulting thereof. While different **institutional types** in HE systems are distinguished through laws and statutes assigning different rights and duties often involving differential funding arrangements and personnel policies, these reflect deeply-rooted role distributions in the system linked to differences in status assigned to these institutions, often springing from specific historical constellations. Similarly, while **access** to HE is ordered through legal provisions as well as formally stated entry requirements of individual HEIs, these are an expression of prevalent

norms and values in the particular society about the desired level and nature of intellectual and social maturity required for entering HE and reflect a societal consensus regarding the percentage of an age group that should acquire these qualifications. Curricular cultures find their expression in the way **curricula** are organised and in the weight attached to different aspects of the curriculum. These are to a large degree formalised in academic statutes, written curricular frameworks, and exam regulations. The **transition** from HE **to employment** includes formal aspects such as entry regulations into certain professions—entry into public service tends to be especially highly regulated in many countries—but also less tangible perceptions of what it takes to be a proper manager, teacher, or engineer, as well as established practices of interaction between the HE and the employment system. Finally, **funding** of HE is an expression of the value assigned to HE as a whole and to different types of HE within the system, expressed in funding arrangements, budgeting formulas, and expenditure-per-student. The perceived public and private benefits of HE influence the willingness of a society to pay for HE through public and/or private sources.

Whenever the adaptation of national degree structures brings about change in any of the six dimensions, this can be expected to create tensions between the formal and informal features; with perceptions of 'how things used to be and therefore should be' exerting a regressive influence. The asymmetries should be traceable in the empirical research.

THE THREE FUNCTIONS OF THE DIMENSIONS. Though these dimensions largely coincide with common aspects of comparison in comparative HE as well as with categories generally used for the description of HE systems, the major criterion upon which the selection is based is their relevance to adaptations of national degree structures towards a common two-cycle model. The dimensions are meant to serve as analytical tools for three major purposes:

(1) to depict central features of the inherited HE systems that constitute the divergent starting points of the countries,

(2) to map the perceptions and preferences that guide various actors in the policy formulation process, and

(3) to identify policy change in relation to adaptations of national degree structures and judge possible convergence.

These three purposes are related to the two-way causality between actors and institutions underlying North's model (see section 3.1.1): in line with the model, this study analyses how the institutional fabric of the existing HE systems influences actor interaction and how the outcomes of these interactions in turn feed back into these systems.

I now explain in what way each dimension is relevant to all three purposes in light of the pertinent HE literature. I also use the literature review to position my study within prior scholarly work in the area as well as clarify my use of terminology. I address the dimension of 'institutional types' upfront, as

understanding the role and function of different types of HEIs in the respective systems is a precondition for explaining the degree structure, which differs by institutional types in most of the countries. This order will be maintained throughout the study.

3.3.1 Institutional types

Two-cycle degree structures offer a peculiar way to deal with functional differentiation in HE (Huisman, 1995), i.e., to balance the functions of education and training, of preparation for professional life outside and inside academia, and between elite and mass education (Trow, 1974, see also section 3.3.5 on 'access'). The reform of degree structures therefore touches directly upon the relationship of different institutional types, particularly between university and non-university HEIs. The first degree can be used to offer a quick way into professional life and lay the basis for a future academic career; the second degree can be used to acquire specific professional knowledge and train as a researcher. It is commonly argued that if the transition between the first and second degree as well as between an academic and a professional orientation is kept open, the two-cycle system is well-suited to allow for the flexibility of individual learning paths needed in a knowledge society (Bensel, Weiler, & Wagner, 2003). Status distinctions in such a system tend to be made based on the individual degree-granting institution rather than the institutional type or formal degree classification. This tendency is characteristic of the highly diversified US-American HE system (Calhoun, 2000) and has been confirmed and amplified by the move from a binary to a unitary system in two Anglo-Saxon countries: England and Australia, in the early 1990s (Fulton, 1996; Meek & O'Neill, 1996; Witte, 2005).

In contrast, in many European countries, the task of functional differentiation within the system has traditionally at least partly been assumed by the differentiation of institutional types rather than degrees (see Teichler, 1996), a form of differentiation that has been termed 'horizontal' as opposed to the 'vertical' differentiation achieved by consecutive degrees (Clark 1978 in Huisman 1995: 32). Different types of HEIs have been entitled by the state to grant different degrees of different standing. Often, the task of professional training has been assigned to non-university HEIs, which also tended to offer shorter degrees. These degree systems were often not consecutive; short and long first degrees have existed side by side and the transition from one to the other has been the exception rather than the rule. In many countries, this has tended to be associated with a clear status hierarchy between university and non-university HE, based on the idea that theory is superior to application and real research requires

detachment from direct professional relevance (Witte, 2005).[45] It is evident that the delineations of such systems do not correspond one-to-one to the above-described potential of two-cycle degree structures where both undergraduate and graduate degrees can vary in the extent of theory versus professional orientation and the pathways between the two are rather flexible. Each European country has its own inherited structure and associated role, task and status distribution between institutional types, and each provides a different starting point for the transition to a common two-cycle system.

In the empirical sections, I therefore study the different institutional types, their roles, and relationships in the different HE systems. This provides the basis for investigating ways in which the inherited task distribution and status hierarchy between institutional types influences the interests of actors and their attitudes to adaptations of degree structures. Is the move to a two-cycle system seen as a chance to overcome stratifications in the HE system, and if so, by whom? Is functional differentiation shifting from institutions to degrees? Does the non-university sector see the introduction of two-cycle degree structures as a chance to move up the status-ladder, and if so, in what ways? Are such ambitions resisted by traditional universities? What is the outcome of such power struggles? Which institutions are given the right to grant undergraduate and graduate degrees? Does the introduction of two-cycle structures contribute to a blurring of borders between institutional types? The answers to these questions will help identify similarities and differences between European HE systems and determine the degree of convergence.

3.3.2 Degree structure

The HE literature on degree structures is largely empirical in nature. Comparative studies have sought to identify patterns and regularities in a bewildering mix of degree titles, types, and study lengths across Europe. As national degree structures are inextricably linked to the diversity of the different types of HEIs that offer the degrees, both issues have often been investigated jointly and both have been subsumed under the broader concept of 'HE structures' or 'patterns' (Furth, 1992; 1992; Teichler, 1988c, 1990, 1993). The OECD, through publications like 'Education at a Glance', has made efforts to develop the statistical basis for international comparisons of degree types and length (see for example OECD, 2005). Teichler (1999b) has pointed out the limits of such comparisons due to differences in nomenclature and positioning of degrees between countries that persist in spite of the common ISCED classification (OECD, 1999). The Bologna process has led to renewed interest in a comparison of degree structures across

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[45] A notable exception are the French grandes écoles which enjoy high status in spite of being professionally oriented (Neave, 1991).

countries, which finds its expression in a number of studies in this area focusing on the newly emerging degrees (Alesi, Burger, Kehm, & Teichler, 2005; Eurydice, 2003, 2005; Haug et al., 1999; Haug & Tauch, 2001; Kiemle, 2003; Klemperer et al., 2002; Reichert & Tauch, 2003, 2005; Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002).

Degree structures in most HE systems are highly complex, made up of a whole range of degrees of different type, length and level—thus, even within a single system, the term needs to be used in plural. As a rough categorisation, some European countries—such as England and France—have a long tradition of consecutive degree structures, while prior to the Bologna declaration others had parallel systems of (shorter) applied degrees ending at a level broadly comparable to the Bachelor and (longer) first degrees leading directly to the Masters level taught at different types of institutions—such as Germany and the Netherlands.[46] It certainly makes a difference in terms of the difficulty of reforms whether the task is to adjust existing tiered degree structures to an emerging 'Bologna model' or to transform a parallel structure into a consecutive one. When trying to bring these inherited systems in line with a tiered structure, a natural response of actors in an HE system is to start 'ordering' their degrees by deciding whether they are 'equivalent' to a first or a second degree. This causes frictions as it is highly unlikely that the old system can be translated one-to-one to a tiered system; from the viewpoint of the old system an 'upgrading' or 'downgrading' of existing degrees seems inevitable as long as the creation of entirely new degrees from scratch is avoided. Even if new degrees are created, people tend to evaluate their standing by comparing them to the degrees they are accustomed to.

The text of the Bologna declaration does not give much guidance regarding the exact design of two-cycle degree structures. It is only noted that the first degree should last a minimum of three years and be 'relevant to the labour market'. In the ensuing European process that will be traced in more detail in chapter 5, it is frequently said that the first degree can last three to four years and the second degree one to two years, with both degrees not exceeding a total of five years (Haug, 1999; Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). It should also be noted that although Anglo-Saxon countries are not the only ones with a tradition of tiered degree structures, 'the Anglo-Saxon model' tends to be perceived as a dominant role model in countries that are newly introducing this structure (Kiemle, 2003; Schnitzer, 1998; Witte et al., 2004). Frequently, the first and second degrees are referred to as Bachelor and Masters—in Germany and the Netherlands, for example. Moreover, though there is more than one Anglo-Saxon model, the two-cycle system is often prematurely equated with a particular Anglo-Saxon variant, mostly either the US-American or British system. These perceptions tend to support certain sympathetic or antipathetic feelings towards the reform and are

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[46] In the Netherlands however, traditional *hogeschool* and university degrees were of the same length, although *hogeschool* degrees have traditionally required a year less of prior schooling (see country case studies in chapters 6 - 9 and comparative analysis in chapter 10 for more details).

used as arguments for adopting a certain degree length or nomenclature. The multitude of possible designs of two-cycle systems is then easily forgotten.

In the empirical chapters of this study, I pay attention to the way the emerging two-cycle degree structures are shaped by the preferences and perceptions drawn from the inherited system, and perceptions of what emerges as 'the' European model in the Bologna process (see chapter 5), as well as Anglo-Saxon role models. When judging the degree of policy change, I also consider implementation policies (see section 2.2), including the mode of transition which may for example, imply that two degree structures are initially maintained in parallel (Klemperer et al., 2002). Finally, I note variations in policies by subject areas and institutional types.

3.3.3 Curricular governance

Under this heading, I analyse who makes decisions about curricula, or—if several actors have a say—how the authority is divided. Two major strands of literature can be distinguished.

The first uses general theoretical frameworks like Van Vught's state model or resource dependence theory to explain curricular innovation in HE. As early as 1989, Van Vught's state model provided the framework for an international comparative study into curricular governance and innovation covering Germany, France, and the Netherlands (Van Vught, 1989). This was followed by other national and international case studies based on the approach (Huisman & Jenniskens, 1994b; Jenniskens, 1997). They can be seen as predecessors of the current debates on curricular quality and diversity as they were based on the expectation that the loosening of state control would foster curricular innovation. Huisman (1995) pursued a slightly different approach, seeking to explain curricular innovation by the resource dependence of HEIs on their government. Toward this end, he defined innovation more narrowly as the creation of new degree programmes, irrespective of their innovative content (see also Huisman & Jenniskens 1994a).

The second relevant research strand deals with quality assurance, and accreditation in particular. In essence, accreditation is a particular mode of assigning authority over HE programmes and thus of curricular governance. The widespread move from more direct forms of state authorisation and control of curricula to accreditation as a primary quality assurance mechanism taking place in many continental European countries in the context of the Bologna process can be interpreted as a transition from hierarchical direction to a self-regulatory or market approach to quality assurance—depending on the actual composition of accreditation boards and agencies. As such, there is no *necessary* link between adaptations of national degree structures and curricular governance. Empirically however, the introduction of a two-cycle system and accreditation is closely

linked in many European HE systems. This is an indicator of institutional change in the dimension of curricular governance. A whole body of literature traces the current reforms of quality assurance systems and the introduction of accreditation in the context of the Bologna process (Adam, 2003; Campbell & Van der Wende, 2000; Crozier, Curvale, & Hénard, 2005; Haug, 2003; Van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2003; Westerheijden, 2003; Westerheijden & Leegwater, 2003). This study will not focus on the technicalities of accreditation but on the associated shifts in authority over curricula. It will also look more deeply into the institutional conditions that have fostered the linkage between the move to a two-cycle degree structure and curricular governance. A similar approach has been pursued by Perellon (2005) for Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

3.3.4 Curricula

'Curricula' is perhaps the least tangible of the six dimensions investigated in this study. The terms 'curricular culture' or 'teaching and learning culture' probably come closest to what is aimed at under this heading. I avoid these terms however, because the analysis includes informal *and* formal aspects, though I expect perceptions and informal practices to play a particularly important role in this dimension.

Curricular concepts are a neglected issue in comparative HE research, probably due to the theoretical and methodological difficulty of characterising differences across disciplines and nations (see Teichler, 1996). By highlighting the linkages between academic cultures and disciplines, studies such as Becher & Trowler (2001) have increased awareness of the subject-specificity in ways of organising and dealing with academic knowledge. Projects such as Tuning (2002) seek to identify the scope for curricular convergence across Europe for a number of specified disciplines.

A subject-specific analysis of different curricula in HE is beyond the scope of the study. I am also aware of the danger of sweeping statements of 'national cultures'. Nevertheless, I hold that a broad assessment and comparison of predominant educational goals and perceptions of academic quality and how this is reflected in programme structures and organisation is both necessary and possible. In the dimension of 'curricula' I thus do not refer to the 'curriculum on paper' only, but mean to denote a broad understanding of differences in conceptions of teaching and learning and the corresponding organisation of studies, possibly differentiated by institutional types and broad subject areas. These differences will be described in the empirical chapters to sketch the different starting points for the adaptations of national structures. Next, I investigate in what ways curricular conceptions are touched upon by adaptations of national degree structures.

The relevance of this question shall be explained for an HE system coming from a one-tier system without modularised programmes and ECTS. First, the move from a one-tier to a two-cycle degree structure implies curricular changes. At a minimum, the previous one-cycle degree programme needs to be split in two parts, with an extra examination introduced at the end of the first part. If the first degree is to become a free-standing degree with relevance for the (European) labour market as stipulated in the Bologna declaration (Witte & Schreiterer, 2003a), the entire 'architecture' of curricular content needs to be altered. Similarly, at the graduate level, possibilities are opened up for developing new curricular profiles geared to different purposes. At both levels, the introduction of the two-cycle system can—but does not need to—trigger a quest for a new balance of breadth and depth, facts and methodology, student freedom and guidance, research-orientation and labour-market orientation in the curriculum. Similarly, the introduction of ECTS stipulated in action line three of the Bologna declaration and generally linked to the adaptations of national degree structures can be argued to transport a certain curricular culture.[47]

This example gives some hints to possible curricular changes implied by adaptations of national degree structures as well as potential issues of debate and lines of conflict. Will the representatives of disciplines and HEIs in the respective countries perceive the introduction of two-cycle degree structures to be compatible with the prevalent approaches to teaching and learning? If not, for which actors will this provide reasons for resistance? Are there actors who support adaptations of degree structures precisely *in order to* bring about curricular reforms which they deem necessary? To what extent are the approaches to the curriculum changed in the course of reforms, and to what extent are 'token solutions' chosen to satisfy reform demands? The answers to these questions will provide important background information for comparing the meaning of the emerging new degrees and degree titles across countries.

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[47] The modularisation of degree programmes, which is a precondition for the attachment of credits, requires a clear structuring of the curriculum, and an explicit relationship between curricular aims and contents as well as between learning goals and time planned for achieving these goals. Though modularisation has no impact whatsoever on contents, it has an impact on the learning style and is for example, incompatible with a completely open-ended learning process without time restrictions (how some commentators interpret the 'Humboldt model' of academic learning). Similarly, the decision about the number of credits attached to a module requires a very conscious and realistic treatment of student time in the curriculum, which is not necessarily a part of curricular culture in all European countries. Moreover, modularisation and ECTS are linked to continuous assessment instead of big final exams, with the different grades accumulating to a final grade in the course of the programme. This implies a one-to-one relationship between the relative time spent on a subject and the relative weight attached to it in the final grade, as well an immediate correspondence between curricular contents and examination contents. Neither is self-evident in all European countries.

3.3.5 Access

The transition to mass HE has been a pervading theme in HE policy since the 1960s and has provided the 'soundtrack' for nearly every HE reform since then (see Teichler, 1996; Trow, 1996). The introduction of two-cycle degree structures is no exception in this regard and raises the question of access in several ways, even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the Bologna declaration. In a series of seminal contributions, Trow (1972; 1974; 1979) points out how the "transition from elite to mass HE" and ultimately to universal access transforms HE systems in a profound way. HE systems have to diversify to cater to different student abilities and interests, and consequently come under increasing cost-cutting pressure. While Trow's writings refer to the first post-war expansion wave of HE in the 1960s, his analysis remains acute (Altbach, 1999; Teichler, 2001). The first wave of expansion in Europe has largely been accommodated by the creation of new types of non-university HEIs (Furth, 1992). In fact, the introduction of two-cycle degree structures can now be regarded as another effort to cope with expanding student numbers as well as make provision for anticipated and politically desired further growth.

To understand the different starting points of the particular HE systems, one first has to know how entry into HE is regulated, which percentage of an age group enters HE and into which kind of HEI, and how the functions of 'elite' versus 'mass' education are balanced in the system—i.e., where the country stands with respect to the 'democratisation' of HE access (Teichler, 1988d). Another crucial aspect of access is the relationship between the first few years of undergraduate education and the preceding secondary education (Mortimore, 1992; Teichler et al., 1980). Once this institutional picture is gained, one can investigate if and how the introduction of two-cycle degree structures is used in the respective national system to change the previous balance. In this respect, the introduction to two-cycle degree structures offers several opportunities:

(1) If the HE system moves from long first degrees to short first degrees, this opens up the possibility to increase access to undergraduate HE for two reasons: (a) more students might have the intellectual ability to gain an undergraduate than a graduate degree, and (b) the financial resources freed by shortening undergraduate education could be used to expand access. This need not be the case however; the resources could also be saved altogether, invested in graduate programmes, or used for quality enhancements (see section 3.3.7 on 'funding').

(2) Equally, the question of access to the Masters level is newly raised, and can be dealt with in different ways. Transition from the undergraduate to the graduate level can be quasi-automatic, or based on selection.

(3) Finally, if the introduction of two-cycle degree structures is linked to the diversification of programmes, curricula, and profiles (see previous sections), this will also have a direct bearing upon access: the more individualised

> programme profiles, the stronger the arguments for individualised entry criteria and the more difficult it becomes to administer access centrally. This phenomenon could occur at the undergraduate and graduate levels, depending on where programme diversification takes place.

In the empirical chapters, I investigate how key actors in the respective HE systems position themselves with respect to these options. Do governments make use of adaptations of degree structures to pursue an agenda of increasing or widening access to HE, or to use the potential flexibility of the system for students with non-traditional learning and working biographies? Do universities lobby for restricting access to the Masters level in order to create elite programmes? Or is the government itself interested in creating niches for elite education? The answers to these and similar questions will shape the adjustments made in the respective countries, and are needed to judge the degree of convergence between the systems. A first degree will mean something else depending on whether it is obtained by 15% or 50% of an age group; a Masters-level degree will be of different value if entry is open to all Bachelor degree holders or is highly selective. The introduction of two-cycle degree structures will thus only make HE more compatible if the regulation of access becomes more compatible as well.

3.3.6   Transition to employment

This dimension, which is variously found under "HE and occupational structures", "HE and the world of work", or "HE and the employment system"; has received much attention from national governments as well as international organisations such as the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Esnault & Le Pas, 1974; OECD, 1993), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the World Bank, and is consequently one of the best-researched issues in HE. The Center for Research on Higher Education and Work at the University of Kassel in Germany has focused on international comparative research in this area since its foundation in 1978.[48] Since the interest in manpower planning arose in the 1960s, questions relating to the transition from HE to employment have been researched increasingly in light of the "'scientification' of employment and work" (Teichler, 1996: 97) and the needs of

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[48]   For example, from 1997-2000, the centre lead a large comparative project "Higher education and graduate employment in Europe" sponsored by the European Commission's programme for Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER), surveying "about 3,000 graduates each from nine countries in the European Region (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), one EFTA country (Norway), one of the Central and Eastern European countries in transition (the Czech Republic) and one economically advanced country outside Europe (Japan)" (Teichler et al., 2000).

the knowledge economy (Bensel et al., 2003). Attention has been given to questions such as in what ways HE assumes a function of pre-career selection (Teichler et al., 1980) and whether graduates find 'adequate' employment. Nevertheless, valid and comparable data in this field is still scarce (Teichler, 2000). In a recent article, Teichler (1999a: 285) summarises the state of the art as follows:

> At the end of the 20th century, the connections between higher education and the world of work are again among the key issues of debate whenever challenges for innovation in higher education are at stake. Job prospects from recent graduates are not consistently viewed as negative. Information on graduate employment is scarce and there are no indisputable criteria for assessing graduate employment. Signals from the employment system are more blurred and ambivalent than ever before. This notwithstanding, many experts and key authors agree on the main directions in which higher education must head in response to the changing challenges from the world of work, e.g. devote greater attention to generic competencies, social skills and personality development, prepare students for the growing globalisation and internationalisation, and serve students through an increasing variety of means beyond classroom teaching and learning.

The connection between two-cycle degree structures and 'transition to employment' is immediately obvious. The Bologna declaration (1999) explicitly mentions 'employability' as one of its three major aims and stipulates that "the degree awarded after the first cycle shall be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification". According to the third EUA 'trends' report, enhancing the employability of graduates—together with improving academic quality—constitutes the most important challenge of the Bologna process in the eyes of HE ministries, institutions, and national rectors' conferences alike (Reichert & Tauch, 2003).

The introduction of two-cycle degree structures raises several issues in this regard. Compared to one-tier degree structures, the sequenced architecture allows for the inclusion of work experience between the undergraduate and graduate phases of HE. This implies a potentially more intense linkage between HE and the employment system as well as the need for Masters-level programmes to account for possible work experience of applicants in their course design and learning methodology. If a country moves from a one-cycle to a two-cycle degree structure, these linkages have to be built. Also, the acceptance of a first degree on the labour market needs to be fostered.

The perceived (lack of) labour market relevance of traditional degrees provides an important context for the reform efforts in different countries, as do expectations of employers regarding the needed qualities of graduates. If traditional degrees are perceived to have deficits in this respect, this can provide a strong motivation for the introduction of two-cycle degree structures and will

shape the curricular design of the new degrees accordingly i.e., with a tendency to stress key skills and professional competencies. Another relevant context factor is professional entry regulations, especially for the public service. The way these are tied to the traditional degrees might constitute an important barrier to change—an example how 'nested rules' create system inertia.

In the empirical chapters, this study therefore outlines major features of the relationship between the HE system and the labour market prior to the adaptations of national degree structures and investigates how much they play a role in the policy formulation phase through actors' perceptions and preferences. Finally, in order to assess the contribution of these adaptations of degree structures to the convergence of HE systems, I compare across countries whether the first degree is intended to open up entry into employment for the vast majority of graduates or if a 'consecutive' model is pursued. At this stage it is too early for an evaluation of labour market acceptance of the new degrees.

3.3.7   Funding

There is a vast, yet segregated literature on funding of HE dealing with different aspects of the topic. These include expenditure on HE and cost per student or graduate (Jongbloed, Koelman, & Vossensteyn, 1994; Jongbloed, Salerno, & Vossensteyn, 2003; OECD, 1974), state budgeting for HE (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Massy, 1996; G. Williams & Massy, 1992; Ziegele, 2001b), budgeting within HEIs (Möncke, Gierstorfer, & Ziegele, 2000; G. Williams & Massy, 1992; Ziegele, 1998), and the costs of studies for students including both living expenses and tuition fees (Jongbloed, 2004; OECD, 1974; Vossensteyn, 2004; Ziegele, 2001a, 2001d). A lot of this literature is rather technical, dealing with concrete problems of measuring costs and expenditures, describing and classifying different funding systems, or making policy recommendations for the design of budgeting or fee systems. Other debates are more political-economic, such as the public versus private debate (Mora & Vila, 2003) and discussions of the increasing importance of economic and managerial thinking in the HE sector, often linked to 'globalisation' (Dill, 2001).

What becomes clear is the extreme difficulty of finding valuable measures of costs and expenditures across systems or even comparing systems according to common criteria. Most indicators, measures, and practices in this area are highly dependent on context, such as the relationship of HE and the state, the distribution of public responsibility for HE across different public institutions, the inherited distribution of public and private responsibilities, mechanisms and channels for HE funding, and the like. A measure of cost per student for example, depends on whether and how public and private costs are counted, how the funding for research and teaching is separated, how long students stay in HE, the field of studies, the institutional type, etc. (Jongbloed et al., 1994). A general

lesson from this literature is that comparative data on study costs and finance needs to be compiled and interpreted with great care.

With respect to adaptations of national degree structures however, objective numbers are much less relevant than perceptions. What is of interest is whether—and if so, in which ways—the financial context of HE influences the emerging pattern of tiered degree structures, particularly with respect to the following aspects:

(1) Does the reform of structures coincide with a wider debate on the cost of HE in a context of general austerity of public expenditure? If this is the case, the two 'agendas' are likely to intermingle.

(2) Are adaptations of degree structures seen as cost-neutral, as a cost-cutting measure, or as something that renders HE more expensive? In what ways do these perceptions influence actors' positions towards the reform? If the existing degree programmes are simply 'divided' into two cycles without changes in access or transition rates, the reform should be cost-neutral. If access to undergraduate education remains unchanged, but selectivity at the Masters level is increased, the reform could save costs. If student/teacher ratios and the quality of education in general are increased, the introduction of two-cycle degree structures could raise costs. All three possibilities exist, depending on the design of the new system.

(3) Are adaptations of national degree structures linked to a debate about the introduction of tuition fees or a change of the level of fees? Such a linkage could be triggered by the fact that a tiered structure lends itself to discrimination between the first and second cycle regarding the respective shares of public and private funding, especially if the first degree formally qualifies for the labour market.

(4) Do linkages between a reform of national degree structures and a widening access agenda bring the financial dimension into play? This could be the case if governments see short degrees leading directly into employment as a way of making it affordable to widen access.

(5) In what way do inherited HE funding systems influence perceptions of the relationship between two-cycle degree structures and finance? For example, the transparency of the current funding mechanisms could have an impact on the debates because a transparent system makes the cost implications of changes in degree length and structure more visible.

(6) Finally, an encompassing welfare-theoretic assessment of the effects of two-cycle degree structures could potentially be very relevant. While such analysis is beyond scope of this paper, they way 'intuitive' assessments of this issue feature in actor's preferences, especially in the motives and goals of government, is included in the empirical work. Such assessments could be

based on the beneficial effects of internationalisation and mobility, increased flexibility, labour market relevance, and the like.

This completes the discussion of institutional dimensions of the HE system.

3.4 Full framework and hypotheses

To recapitulate, beginning with North's model of institutional change, I have used conceptual elements from ACI to specify the study of actor interaction, and deduced key dimensions of HE systems in order to break down the study of the initial institutional setting and policy change to the research topic. Figure 3.9 summarises the full theoretical framework developed in this chapter.

At this point, I would like to re-highlight an aspect of the framework which derives from the two-way causality between actors and institutions underlying North's model of institutional change (see section 3.1.1, but also chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.5.3 for a more general reflection). In the framework, I make a clear analytical distinction between the institutional and the actor side; assigning formal and informal features to the former and actor preferences, perceptions and capabilities to the latter. While formal and informal features are an element of the initial institutional setting, their adjustment takes place through actor interaction in the policy formulation process, leading to formal and informal change. In other words, the formal and informal features not only play a role in the model as constraints and 'enablers' of policy change, but also undergo change themselves in the process. Conversely, while actor preferences, perceptions, and capabilities come to bear in the policy formulation process, they are conditioned by the institutional setting: preferences are influenced by the incentives (or as I prefer, by the driving forces), perceptions by the shared mental maps, and capabilities by the opportunities provided by the institutional setting. As explained in section 3.1.3 this also implies some degree of overlap between the concept of informal features and perceptions: informal features are those widely shared perceptions, norms, and values that have become embedded in the institutional setting in terms of habits and 'ways things are done'. While the framework differentiates these aspects as far as possible, ignoring the interdependencies would not do justice to reality.

Figure 3.9: Full theoretical framework

European institutional context of the Bologna process
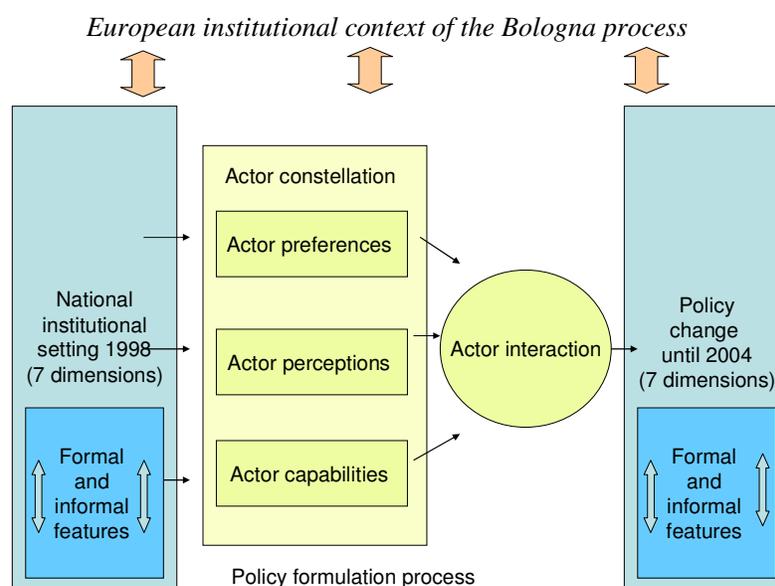
As I explain in more detail in the ensuing methodological chapter, I use the framework to address my research questions in two major ways: (1) to guide the national case studies and the comparative analysis, and (2) to shed light on a selected number of specific causal relationships by means of a set of hypotheses.

Box 3.1: Hypotheses

(I)   The more the national institutional setting supports actor preferences for change…

(II)   The more actor perceptions in an HE system are influenced by the interational context…

(III) The stronger the capabilities of the national ministries responsible for HE in the respective HE system…

(IV)   The less persistent informal and formal constraints of national HE systems…

   …the more policy change takes place.

To conclude this chapter, I therefore recapitulate the hypotheses developed on selected theoretical aspects of the above framework (see sections 3.1.7 and 3.2.6).

They seek to explain the *degree* of policy change in HE systems that is brought about in the context of adaptations of national degree structures.

Before turning to the methodology, I summarise and reflect once more how these hypotheses relate to the different elements of the theoretical framework. In chapter 11, I confront them with the empirical findings and check their explanatory power.

The first three hypotheses focus on key aspects of the actor constellation, namely actor preferences (I), perceptions (II), and capabilities (III), to explain the degree of policy change. The fourth hypothesis captures the effect of the benevolence of the initial institutional setting on the degree of policy change (see Figure 3.10).

Hypothesis I spells out a straightforward condition for policy change, namely that actors in the system have the willingness to bring about change. The formulation focuses attention on those preferences conditioned by the national institutional setting, particularly by problem pressure that constitutes incentives for change. Hypothesis IV highlights one aspect of the formal and informal features of the national institutional setting, namely their function as constraints or obstacles to change. At the heart of the framework is the counteraction of hypotheses I and IV: the national institutional framework ultimately conditions both actor preferences for change and the formal and informal constraints that impede their realisation.

Hypotheses II and III formulate two different mechanisms of overcoming formal and informal constraints, thus diminishing their negative effect on change. Hypothesis II is based on the theoretical argument that the influence of the international context on actor perceptions can contribute to overcoming informal constraints by facilitating a 'redescription of mental maps'. Hypothesis III builds on the assumption that the national ministry responsible for HE plays a key role among the actors in national HE policy. It can crucially contribute to overcoming both types of constraints: formal constraints, by passing new legislation and other forms of regulation; informal constraints, by providing an effective framework for what Scharpf calls the "negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy" by fostering the necessary informal support for the intended formal changes. The hypotheses are operationalised in the following methodological chapter.

Figure 3.10: Graphical depiction of the hypotheses
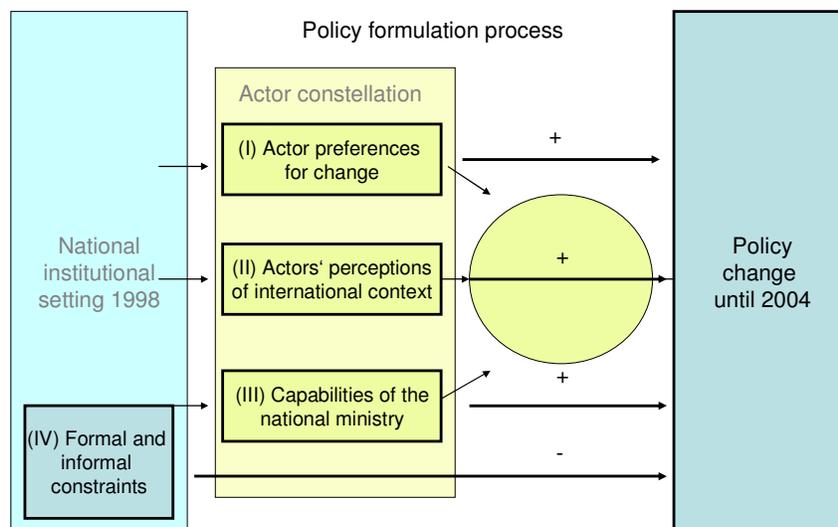
4 Methodology and operationalisation

Based on the theoretical framework developed in the last chapter, I use a comparative case-study approach to compare the adaptation of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England between 1998 and 2004. Before turning to the empirical part, in this chapter I explain the research design, motivation for the case selection and time frame, and discuss methodological considerations that influenced the operationalisation, data collection, and analysis.

4.1 Research design

The research questions posed at the outset of this study are:

Box 4.1: Research questions (repeated)

RQ1.	How are the national degree structures adapted in the context of the Bologna process and what changes does this imply for other relevant dimensions of the respective HE systems?
RQ2.	What explains the nature and degree of change in the respective HE systems and the similarities and differences between them?
RQ3.	Do the adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process contribute to the convergence of the respective HE systems?

The research design deals with these questions in a three-step process that proceeds in ascending levels of abstraction. First, the understanding of adaptations of degree structures in each of the four HE systems through in-depth national case studies is an empirical research objective in itself (RQ1). Second, the cross-case comparison of the four cases serves to analyse differences and similarities in change between HE systems (RQ2) and identify the degree of convergence (RQ3). Third and finally, key elements of the underlying theoretical framework are 'tested' for their ability to answer one aspect of RQ2, namely the degree of change. The three purposes are thus combined in a comparative case-study design (Yin, 1984) that consists of three steps: individual case studies, cross-case comparison, and review of hypotheses. In the following, I discuss each of the steps in more detail and explain how they use the theoretical framework to address the research questions.

STEP A: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES. The individual country[49] case studies (chapters 6 – 9) present the results of a thorough within-case analysis, thereby answering research question 1 as well as providing the factual basis for the subsequent comparative analysis.

In terms of Eckstein's (1975) classification, the individual case studies can be classified as "disciplined-configurative": the configurative analysis aims at the comprehensive, in-depth understanding of each individual case while disciplined by an overarching framework. In this first step, it is important to provide enough room to account for the specifics of the individual case. I account for this by presenting the initial situation and the changes in a pre-defined structure, but leaving sufficient leeway for country-specific characteristics. Similarly, I chose for an integrated, chronological account of the policy formulation process that allows for country-specific weightings in the presentation. In this regard, the theoretical framework serves as a bridge between the case-study logic and the logic of comparative research; by providing the structure for presentation of data in the individual case studies, it lays the ground for systematic cross-case comparison.

Answering research question 1 requires a number of initial theoretical and methodological choices, the first of which is to identify and define the 'relevant dimensions of the respective HE systems'. This was done in the theory chapter (see section 3.3): in addition to national degree structures, I consider changes in institutional types, curricular governance, curricula, access, transition to employment, and funding. The second choice is to delineate the time frame for investigating change. I chose the period from early 1998 to autumn 2004 (for a justification see section 4.3 later in this chapter). Based on these choices, I divide the first research question into the following sub-questions:

(1a) What were the inherited institutional features in the seven dimensions of the respective HE systems that provided the starting point for the reforms in early 1998?

(1b) How did the major actors in national HE policy interact in the policy formulation process on adaptations of national degree structures?

(1c) What changes were brought about in the seven dimensions of the respective HE systems in the context of the Bologna process until 2004?

The case studies are organised according to these sub-questions, as indicated by the headings "Institutional setting in 1998" (1a), "Policy formulation" (1b) and "Policy change until 2004" (1c) in the country chapters. The policy formulation process is presented in chronological order, considering developments in all seven dimensions in conjunction. As a prerequisite for reconstructing the policy

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[49] In this study, the term 'country' is often used in a loose way to denote 'HE system'. Even though this is not explicitly mentioned each time, 'national HE systems' are the relevant unit of analysis and it is actually these systems that are compared when talking of cross-country comparisons.

formulation process, the major actors in national HE policy had to be identified and their capabilities described. This is done at the outset of each country chapter in an extra section headed "Actors and their capabilities".

STEP B: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS. Research questions 2 and 3 are answered by a comparative analysis across cases. Research question 2 is dealt with first and receives the most attention. I use the comparative approach not only to identify differences and similarities across cases, but also as an analytical tool to find causal explanations for the observed changes in individual HE systems.

In terms of Mayntz' (2002: 13) terminology, the method used throughout the comparative analysis can be classified as 'causal reconstruction'. This method "does not seek static relationships between variables, but seeks to explain the investigated macro phenomenon by identifying the processes and interdependencies that contribute to its emergence [own translation]." In other words, the method serves to develop a tailor-made explanation of each individual case using a common set of explanatory factors but allowing for variety in their country-specific characteristics and interaction. It is adequate to study multi-dimensional phenomena such as policy formulation processes with the involvement of many actors. The method does not claim to yield scientific certainty, but aims at plausibility and understanding in the sense of the German concept of *Verstehen*. The resulting explanations thus cannot be tested in the strict statistical meaning of the term. Instead, I see their 'test' in whether they find the consent of intimate connoisseurs of the respective HE system. Here, I combined this method with a comparative approach, based on the premise that a comparative perspective helps to see more clearly which factors made a difference in a particular country.

To compare the nature and degree of change across the four HE systems, the seven institutional dimensions from the individual case studies were examined and systematically compared along a set of sub-dimensions. To explore and explain the differences in outcomes, a selection of explanatory categories from the theoretical framework (see Figure 3.9)was investigated in more depth; namely actor preferences, perceptions and capabilities, the overall actor constellation and their interaction in the policy formulation process (see the following section 4.4 for their definition and operationalisation), as well as the formal and informal features of the inherited institutional setting. The analysis was thus structured along the following sub-questions:

(2a) How do the inherited institutional features *in the seven dimensions* that provided the starting point for the reforms in early 1998 compare between the respective HE systems?

(2b) How do the changes brought about *in the seven dimensions* in the context of the Bologna process until 2004 compare between the respective HE systems?

(2c) How can the similarities and differences across HE systems regarding these changes be explained, *referring to actor preferences, perceptions and capabilities,*

the overall actor constellation and their interaction in the policy formulation process on adaptations of national degree structures, as well as to the *formal and informal features of the institutional setting*?

This cross-case analysis was performed for each of the seven dimensions individually to arrive at an overall result. For each dimension, it was structured into a section "mapping policy change and convergence" (2a, 2b) and a section analysing the "explanatory factors" (2c).

The answer to research question 3 followed quite naturally from the analysis of question 2b: If the HE systems were more similar in 2004 than they were in 1998 and this increased similarity was brought about in the context of the adaptation of degree structures, the adaptations of degree structures were judged to have contributed to the convergence of HE systems. I thus operationalised convergence not as the approximation of a single state, but as an increasing degree of similarity between certain key dimensions. I did not intend to determine the *degree* of convergence, but only whether convergence took place. This implied the following operationalisation of research question 3:

(3) Did the changes brought about in the seven dimensions in the context of the Bologna process until 2004 render the respective HE systems more similar?

This analysis too, was performed for each of the seven dimensions individually to prepare the overall discussion of convergence in a concluding section.

STEP C: REVIEWING THE HYPOTHESES. In addition to the country case studies and the comparative analysis presented in chapters 6 to 10, I set out to explicitly 'test' key elements of the theoretical framework in this research setting, focusing on their ability to explain differences in the degree of change between countries as one aspect of research question 2. To achieve this, I derived several hypotheses tailored to the particular policy context presented at the end of the theory chapter (see Box 3.1). I did so in full awareness of the limitations of the case-study approach as compared to large-scale sampling designs regarding the testing of associations between a set of variables. In the following section, I address the limitations of such an approach and explain why a focused review of a limited number of hypothesised relationships is nevertheless a valuable complement to the more grounded approach pursued in the case studies and the comparative analysis.

The hypotheses assume a causal relationship between a limited set of aspects of the institutional setting and the policy process (i.e., the independent variables) and policy change over the predefined study period (i.e., the dependent variable). The level of analysis is thus the national policy formulation process of which, quite logically, there is only one per country. This results in two problems when compared to a large-scale sample approach in quasi-experimental design: the reduction of complex interrelated social processes to only a few variables and, the small ratio of cases to independent variables.

The first issue is shared by all retrospective research questions, i.e., questions that start with a social phenomenon to be explained and subsequently seek to identify the factors that cause it. Questions of this type have to cope with multi-causality and infinite regress (Scharpf, 1997). I address this issue by combining the review of hypotheses with the other two research steps described in the previous sections. While the cross-case comparison leaves room for more nuanced multi-causal explanations, the hypotheses deliberately pick out a limited set of potentially decisive factors.

The second issue is known as the "small-n" or "many variables and few cases" problem (Lijphart, 1971; Mayntz, 2002; Peters, 1998; Scharpf, 1997, 2000a) and leads to over-determination of the dependent variable (see Landman 2000: 38-39). A number of approaches are suggested in modern methodology textbooks that ultimately all go back to methods to identify causal connections proposed by John Stuart Mill as early as 1846: the *method of agreement*, the *method of difference,* and the *method of concomitant variations* (see Peters 1998). Mill himself however, had concerns in applying these methods to the social sciences. In particular, the complexity of causal relations in this area (Lijphart, 1971; Peters, 1998) makes it difficult to solve the control problem i.e., the question of which variables and alternative explanations to include and which to safely ignore (Sartori, 1991). Two of the most commonly used methods today are the 'most similar systems design' (MSSD), and the 'most different systems design' (MDSD) first presented by Przeworski and Teune (1970).

The MSSD seeks to compare cases that ideally are similar in all respects except for the few factors under investigation. Under these conditions, the method of concomitant variations is applied to make causal inferences. MSSD is treated as *the* methodological justification for area studies. There are however some general concerns towards the applicability of MSSD that its inventors Przeworski and Teune (1970: 34) themselves shared. Obviously groups of countries like 'the Northern European countries' or 'the Anglo-American countries' vary in far too many respects to fully control for the influence of theoretically neglected variables (Peters, 1998).

In the MDSD, the unit of analysis is not entire systems, but causal relationships between a set of variables. The idea behind the approach is that if a causal relationship holds true across very different national contexts, then there is certain likelihood that it is a general law. The MDSD is thus based on the method of agreement. The example given by Przeworski and Teune (1970: 35) is that "if rates of suicide are the same among the Zuni, the Swedes, and the Russians, those factors that distinguish these three societies are irrelevant for the explanation of suicide." They conclude that "whereas studies of concomitant variation require positive identification of relevant systemic factors, 'the most different systems' design centres on eliminating irrelevant systemic factors (ibid: 35)." While the MDSD is in line with Popper's falsification strategy and methodologically

stronger than the MSSD, it "is in many ways closer to a statistical design than to a true comparative design" (Peters 1998: 41).

Neither approach is suited for my study. Applying the MSSD is subject to the fundamental methodological problem of identifying a set of countries that differ in no other respect than the explanatory variables, while applying the MDSD would require a constant degree of change (the dependent variable) across all countries studied. Even if these problems could be solved—which is doubtful based on the above discussion—both MSSD and MDSD would completely submit the choice of countries to the sampling logic and prohibit any considerations of policy relevance.

Given these profound methodological issues about the approximation of quasi-statistical methods by means of a case-study design, the 'testing' of hypotheses in this study is done in all modesty, serving as a stylised summary of my qualitative findings rather than a statistical test. Based on the complexity of the matter outlined in the case studies and their comparison, I expect that the hypotheses can help shed a focused light on a limited number of selected causal relationships, but cannot replace the much richer and more nuanced preceding analysis.

In the awareness of these limitations, I nevertheless try to minimise the problems of over-determination of my dependent variable by following three strategies: (1) determine whether the expected direction of the partial explanatory factor coincides with the observed degree of change; (2) attempt to analytically separate the partial effect of one explanatory factor, even if it is different from the overall result; and finally (3), undertake a holistic analysis of the partial contribution of the various factors to the overall result. This analysis is performed in chapter 11.

OVERALL RESEARCH DESIGN. Figure 4.1 summarises the three-step research design. The approach moves successively from the case-specific to the abstract—or, in the words of Babbie (1989) from description through exploration to explanation. I first use the advantages of the case study design to do justice to the specifics of the country cases in the descriptive and explorative parts and subsequently focus on the relationship between a limited set of variables. I thereby seek to tackle the "fundamental trade-off between the virtues of complexity and generalisation" faced by every comparative study (Peters, 1998: 5). This trade-off is also referred to as the opposition of nomothetic (generalising, rule seeking) and idiographic (individualising, interpretative) approaches (Eckstein, 1975), or of configurative and statistical methods of analysis (Lijphart, 1971).

Figure 4.1: Research design
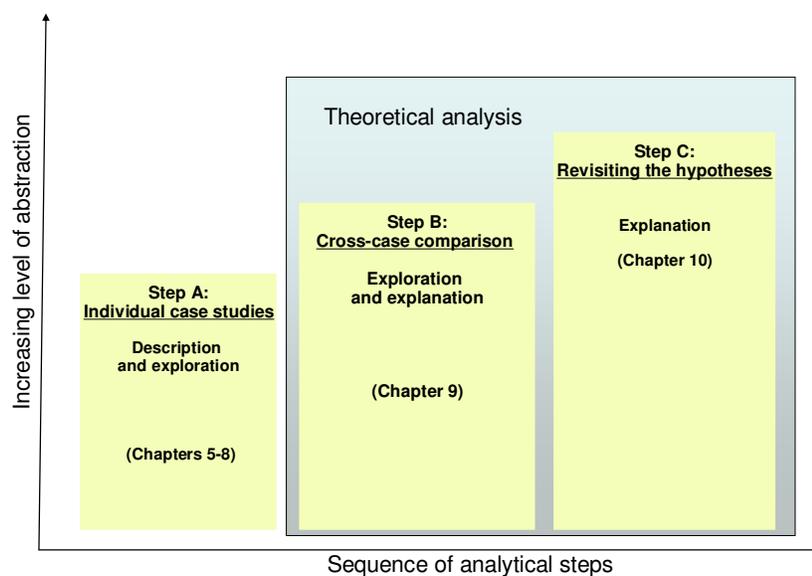
4.2   Case selection

This section explains two decisions: the number of cases chosen, and the choice of countries included in the study. Based on what I have said in the last section, neither the number nor the choice of countries was guided by a sampling logic in the sense of yielding a representative set of cases. Following Yin (1984), I aim at analytical generalisation rather than statistical representation.

NUMBER OF CASES. Deciding on the number of countries was subject to a trade-off between the number of cases treated and the amount of attention available for each particular case. On the one hand, the complexity of the research topic and the multi-dimensional theoretical framework called for an in-depth treatment of each case. On the other, making relevant statements on the Bologna process and the degree of European convergence, required including several countries even if I did not aim at statistical representation. While a comparison between two or three countries would also have been possible, I intended to cover a certain range of HE systems in order to capture the diversity of national responses to the Bologna process. The selection of four countries thus does not reflect objective

necessities, but what I saw as a reasonable balance between breadth and depth of analysis in the available time frame for this study.

CHOICE OF COUNTRY CASES. Three sets of considerations guided the selection of HE systems: policy relevance, theory, and practicability.

Policy relevance. Given a limited set of country cases and in view of achieving maximum representation of the largest and most influential national institutional contexts in the European HE sector, I deemed it desirable to at least represent the three major historical reference models for European HE—namely the Humboldtian, the Napoleonic, and the Anglo-Saxon (Neave, 2001b). Consequently, I opted for Germany, France, and England. Considering the relevance of Anglo-Saxon role models in the national debates on the introduction of tiered degree structures in other European countries, the English case plays a double role both as a participant in the Bologna process and as a reference case. While the Dutch HE system combines Humboldtian, Anglo-Saxon, and to some degree Napoleonic influences, its inclusion into the sample is largely justified by its importance as a champion of HE reform in Europe.

The picture could have been further completed adding an HE system each from Northern, Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe, which all have specific institutional heritages. After weighing the marginal benefits and costs, I opted against the inclusion of additional countries from these regions (cf. the section on 'number of countries' above and on 'practical considerations' below).

Theoretical considerations. This study seeks to develop causal explanations while conscious of the limitations set by the research design discussed above. As recommended by Peters (1998), the HE systems are chosen with a view to yielding variation in explanatory factors as well as in the dependent 'variable'—i.e., the nature and degree of change—to support the development of such causal relationships. In light of the theoretical framework, I expect actor constellations and their interaction to be influenced by the national institutional setting. Initial variation in the seven dimensions in 1998 should generate variation in the actor-related factors. As collecting information on the institutional setting is part of the research task, only a preliminary and broad assessment is presented at this point, which suffices to show that significant variation can be expected (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Variation in the seven institutional dimensions of HE systems in 1998

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Institutional types	Binary system	Binary system	Fragmented/stratified system	Unified system
Degree structure	One-cycle	One-cycle	Four-tiered, three cycles	Two-cycle

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Curricular governance	State authorisation by *Länder*, national curricular frameworks	Self-governed peer-review under delegated state supervision	*Habilitation* (State authorisation, national curricular frameworks)	Tradition of institutional autonomy, recently increased influence of national quality assurance agency
Curricula	Low degree of organisation and external discipline	Medium degree of organisation and external discipline	High degree of organisation and external discipline	High degree of organisation and external discipline
Access	Secondary school confers entitlement to enter HE	Secondary school confers entitlement to enter HE	Secondary school confers entitlement to enter universities, *grandes écoles* can select	HEIs select students
Transition to employment	First university degree at Masters level, first *Fachhochschul* degree between Bachelor and Masters level	First university degree at Masters level, first *hogeschool* degree at Bachelor level	Many formal, but few real exit options below Masters level	First degree at Bachelor level, generalist concept of employability
Funding	Funding of teaching function not clearly linked to student numbers No fees	Funding of teaching function clearly linked to student numbers Moderate fees	Funding of teaching function not clearly linked to student numbers No fees	Funding of teaching function clearly linked to student numbers Considerable fees

Note: For a more detailed and nuanced description of the state of the HE systems in these dimensions in 1998, see country chapters 6 - 9 and the comparative analysis in chapter 10.

Practical considerations. Finally, practical considerations also influenced the choice of country cases. First and foremost was command of foreign languages, initial familiarity with the cases, and data availability. I am fluent in German and English, speak some French, and read Dutch and French, so I have at least passive understanding of all the languages needed in my research. This greatly enhanced

the accessibility of primary documents such as laws, decrees, position papers, and national reports, which would have been impeded by the need to have them interpreted by local practitioners who would bring to bear their biases and understanding. Contrary to common understanding, these documents are generally not available in English; only selected Bologna policy papers have been made available in English by the individual national actors. My language abilities also improved the richness of the interviews, which I conducted almost exclusively in the mother tongue of the national actors. The only exceptions were the Dutch interviews; but the Dutch interviewees were generally quite at ease with the English language. Even here, the possibility to use Dutch terminology to hint at unique national concepts or institutions greatly eased understanding. Overall, it proved that my command of these languages contributed significantly to the openness of the interviewees and thereby improved the data basis for my study.

I had some initial familiarity with the German, Dutch, and English cases due to precedent and parallel studies on these countries on the same or related topics (Klemperer et al., 2002; Lub et al., 2003; Schreiterer & Witte, 2001; Witte et al., 2004; Witte & Schreiterer, 2003c). Data availability for Germany and the Netherlands was supported by the partnership of CHE and CHEPS that underlies this study. In France, I worked closely with the *Centre de Sociologie des Organisations* (CSO) and in England with a range of centres from the UK HE Europe Unit to the QAA.

4.3 Period studied

To ensure comparability, I needed to define common dates across HE systems for the assessment of the initial situation as well as the point in time to assess the changes. A multi-national process does, of course, not begin on a tabula rasa in the nations analysed but builds on the respective institutional legacies and histories of debate. In the logic of these specific national developments early 1998, the starting date chosen for international comparison, can appear artificial and necessitated compromises. It is however, a common denominator that can be justified based on what is generally accepted as the key events of the Bologna process. 1998 is the year prior to the Bologna declaration, and thus suited to capture the state of European HE systems before the Bologna process. It is also the year of the Sorbonne declaration, the immediate predecessor of the Bologna declaration signed by the national ministers responsible for HE of three of the four countries included in this study: France, Germany, and England. In France, the Sorbonne declaration—a French policy initiative—is generally seen as the starting point of the Bologna process. In this country, first elements of policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures in the context of the Sorbonne declaration can be traced back to 1997. In Germany, a major amendment of the

national HE framework act was passed in autumn 1998 that anticipated key aspects of the Bologna reforms; the policy formulation process for this legal reform had begun a few years earlier. For England and the Netherlands, early 1998 is an obvious choice. England joined the Sorbonne declaration in a rather ad hoc way in 1998; although the Netherlands did not sign the Sorbonne declaration, actors in the Dutch HE system started to respond to the Sorbonne declaration in the summer of 1998.

The end date of autumn 2004 is mainly dictated by the end point of data collection. At this point in time, I conducted the actor interviews in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England and thereby completed systematic data collection. Developments after that time can only receive cursory attention and are considered in footnotes wherever they seem crucial. As policy formulation is ongoing, the time span between the completion of data collection and publication of the thesis should ideally have been smaller, but this did not prove possible given the huge amount of data. To account for that, both the 1998 and the 2004 situation are reported in past tense.

Beyond pragmatic reasons, I expected a six-year study period to be sufficient to effectively observe policy change in view of the common duration of national legislative processes and election periods of national governments. However, as already discussed, the period is too short to assess the implementation of these policies on the level of individual HEIs, which will be a task for future research.

4.4 Operationalisation

The discussion on operationalisation follows the distinction of institution- and actor-related concepts that forms the basis for the theoretical framework (see Figure 3.9).

4.4.1 Institution-related concepts

The same institution-related concepts are used for mapping the institutional setting of HE that forms the starting point of the analysis in 1998 and for assessing the nature and degree of change until 2004, namely the distinction between 'formal and informal constraints/features', and 'the seven dimensions'. I deal with each in turn before explaining how I conceptualise change for the purpose of this study.

4.4.1.1 Formal and informal features/constraints

The distinction between formal and informal constraints is a basic element of North's model of institutional change. In my theoretical framework, I extend this

to formal and informal features (see section 3.1.4). I make use of these concepts in four ways.

(1) The concept of formal and informal features underlies the description of the institutional setting in 1998. Even if I do not explicitly elaborate on each individual aspect, this description includes both formal and informal features. I operationalise formal features of institutions as laws, decrees, and other forms of state regulation. Under informal features, I capture those widely shared perceptions, norms, values, and paradigms that have become embedded in the institutional setting in terms of habits and 'ways things are done'.[50] I derive them either from the analysis of the institutional setting or from white papers, position statements, speeches, media coverage, and the interviews. In this definition of informal and formal features, I include both the constraining and the enabling side of institutions (see also section 3.1.4 in the theoretical chapter).

(2) The concept is also used to distinguish formal and informal policy change. The difference between the two is straightforward. If formal features change, this constitutes formal change; if informal features change, this constitutes informal change. Formal change can, but does not need to, translate into informal change and vice versa (see section 4.4.1.3 for the operationalisation of 'policy change'). Again, formal and informal features cannot only constrain, but also facilitate change.

(3) Third, formal and informal features are used as an analytical category in the comparative analysis. Based on the descriptive comparison of the institutional setting, I focus explicitly on how the institutional setting of 1998 (including formal and informal aspects), shaped national policies along the seven dimensions with respect to their nature and how it contributed to the implied degree of change.

(4) Finally, the narrower concept of formal and informal constraints is used as an explanatory category in the comparative analysis and as a variable in hypothesis (IV). In the review of hypotheses, I draw on the analysis performed under (3) to explain differences in the degree of change by differences in the persistence of formal and informal constraints across HE systems. The persistence of formal constraints depends positively on the reliance on regulation for the steering of HE, the 'nesting' of regulation, and the complexity of procedures for changing regulation. The persistence of cultural constraints depends positively on the attachment of actors to certain perceptions, norms, values, and paradigms enshrined in modes of conduct, as well as its underpinning by traditions and cultural reference points (such as 'Humboldt' or 'republican values').

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[50] As I highlighted in the theory chapter (section 3.4), some overlap between the concepts of informal features and 'perceptions' is inherent in the model.

4.4.1.2 The seven institutional dimensions of HE systems

In section 3.3, I identified seven institutional dimensions of HE systems. I use these dimensions for a dual purpose; first, to map the institutional setting of national HE in 1998; second, to assess the nature and degree of change. This section presents the choice of sub-dimensions that I used to operationalise the dimensions. I developed the sub-dimensions in an iterative, grounded process. Literature review and precedent practitioner knowledge yielded an initial list, which I used to explore relevant issues in the four HE systems. Based on this knowledge, I generated a limited number of sub-dimensions that formed the common basis for the comparative analysis. The selection was guided by their cross-national relevance for capturing the institutional starting points and policy change in the context of adaptations of national degree structures (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Operationalisation of the seven institutional dimensions of HE systems

Institutional dimension	Sub-dimensions
Institutional types	- Institutional types - Degree types in relation to institutional types - Degree levels and titles in relation to institutional types - Cooperation and permeability
Degree structure	- Degree levels - Degree types - Degree titles
Curricular governance	- Nature of curricular governance system - Degree of curricular diversity - National capacity planning
Curricula	- Internal structure of studies - Credits and modularisation/organisation of academic year - Curricular culture/skills and general education - Discrepancy between *de facto* and de jure length of studies
Access	- Secondary education - Entry rates to HE/increasing-participation agenda - Access to HE - Access to the Masters level
Transition to employment	- First degree seen as qualifying for the labour market - Degree of regulation linking HE to public service - Relationship between HE and private sector
Funding	- Spending on HE - Funding of the teaching function - Tuition fees and student support

INSTITUTIONAL TYPES. Under 'institutional types', I look at the number of different HEIs, their role and relationship, and possible status hierarchies. As the types and levels of degrees and the titles they can grant are in most cases a constitutive feature of the particular institutional types and the delineations between them, 'degree types' and 'degree levels and titles in relation to institutional types' are also considered and some correlation with the 'degree structure' is obvious. I also look at the 'cooperation and permeability' between different institutional types, particularly with respect to the mutual acceptance of degrees and student mobility. This dimension is systematically presented first, because an understanding of the different types of HEIs is a prerequisite for presenting their degree structures.

DEGREE STRUCTURE. Here I analyse the adaptations of national degree structures in the course of the Bologna process, making this central among the seven dimensions. I divide it into three aspects: degree levels, types, and titles. I count 'degree levels' in years of full-time study upon the completion of the secondary education (SE) required for entry into HE of the respective type.[51] To give an example, 'level SE+3' means 'three years of full-time study upon completion of secondary education'. 'Bachelor level' and 'Masters level' are also used as generic terms to indicate the level of studies (SE+3-4 and SE+4-5 respectively), independent of the specific titles of degrees at this level (e.g., Honours degree, *licence*). 'Degree types' refers to both formal and informal degree classifications that are common in the respective national contexts, such as the distinction between theoretical- and practical-oriented degree programmes or between initial and further (experience-related) education. 'Degree titles' refers to common nomenclatures of degrees, such as 'Master of Arts' or '*Diplom-Ingenieur*', both nationally regulated and institutional.

CURRICULAR GOVERNANCE. I consider three aspects under this heading. First, the 'nature of the curricular governance system': who has the final say about curricula and which other actors are involved, and what is the role of accreditation and evaluation agencies in this regard? Next, I assess the 'degree of curricular diversity' and report the eventual existence of national curricular frameworks. Finally, if and how the overall coherence of the national programme supply is ensured by specific bodies or policy instruments is analysed under 'national capacity planning'.

CURRICULA. Four sub-dimensions seek to capture this dimension. Under 'internal structure of studies', I report common sub-divisions of curricula such as propaedeutic exams and the distinction between 'basic' and 'advanced' studies.

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[51] I have adopted this notation for the sake of readability. It differs from the notation used in the Bologna declaration, which uses ECTS credits to indicate workload (i.e. 180-240 ECTS credits for a Bachelor degree and another 60-120 credits for a Master degree, based on the assumption of 60 ECTS credits per year of full-time studies).

The existence of 'credits and modularisation' and the 'organisation of the academic year' into terms or semesters are also considered. Under 'curricular culture', I present common role models for good education and the degree of freedom left to students in organising their curriculum. A particular aspect of curricular cultures that is compared across countries is how much attention is paid to 'skills and general education' in the curriculum. Finally, the 'discrepancy between the *de jure* and the *de facto* length of studies' is reported; an aspect that is influenced by the German perspective, where it constitutes a particular problem.

ACCESS. Here I consider three sub-dimensions of the transition from secondary to higher education and the transition from the first to the second degree. First, I focus on features of 'secondary education' that are relevant for the transition to HE. Next, I assess 'entry rates to HE', i.e., the percentage of an age group that enters HE, and ask whether the country has an 'increasing-participation agenda'. Under 'access to HE', I then compare entry requirements for different types of HEIs. Similarly, 'access to the Masters level' refers to entry requirements of programmes at Masters level.

TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT. In the first sub-dimension, I identify the 'first degree seen as qualifying for the labour market' in the respective national context and how this changes with the introduction of two-cycle degree structures. The next two sub-dimensions deal with the relationship between the HE system and the public and private sectors, respectively. I ask to what extent 'regulation linking HE to public service' ties the two systems together, constituting potential obstacles to adaptations of national degree structures. Similarly, I compare special characteristics of the 'relationship between HE and the private sector' across countries.

FUNDING. The sub-dimension 'spending on HE' compares the funding situation of HE across systems. I focus on funding for educational purposes i.e., excluding funding of HEIs for research. Under 'funding of the teaching function', I look at models for distributing public funds across HEIs, asking to what extent student numbers play a role in the allocation. Finally, to the extent that they are influenced by the adaptation of national degree structures, 'tuition fees and student support' systems receive cursory attention.

4.4.1.3 Policy change

As explained in sections 2.2 and 3.1.5, the concept of policy change is central to this study. In the comparative analysis, I explore and explain the nature and degree of policy change following the method of causal reconstruction. In the hypotheses, the degree of policy change functions as a dependent variable. In line with North's model, I understand policy change as a form and an aspect of institutional change. Based on insights from implementation research on time spans needed before institutional change can ultimately be assessed (Sabatier, 1999a), I distinguish policy change from the change brought about at the level of

HEIs by policy implementation (see also Theisens, 2004 for a similar distinction). As it is too early to evaluate the latter, this study focuses on policy change. While I do not investigate the implementation of policies at the level of individual HEIs, I do include national implementation policies in my analysis of policy formulation and policy change (see also section 2.2.2).

In this section, I discuss the operationalisation of formal and informal policy change before proceeding to the distinction between 'policy formulation along the seven dimensions' and 'implementation policy'. I then delineate the scope of change analysed in this study. Finally, I discuss how I compare the degree of change between HE systems.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL POLICY CHANGE. As discussed in the last section, both formal and informal changes constitute forms of institutional change; but only if they go hand in hand can one speak of sustainable institutional change. Policy change too, consists of formal and informal changes. From what we know about the nature of policy formulation in European HE, reforms cannot be imposed unilaterally by the government (see sections 2.3.2 and 3.2). Policy formulation always requires the involvement of stakeholders and a certain level of agreement on the intended changes, although to varying degrees. Formal change in European HE thus cannot be brought about without changes in perceptions, norms, values, and paradigms among actors in national HE policy i.e., without overcoming informal constraints.[52] This study not only assesses the degree of formal change, but also the change of views among actors in national HE policy. In doing so, it assesses the degree to which formal and informal constraints that are part of the institutional setting (see also hypothesis IV) have been overcome in the course of policy formulation (see also section 3.4 and RQ 2c in section 4.1).

This study focuses on policy change, taking into account both formal and informal change at the level of national policy. While change at the level of HEIs is considered whenever system-wide information was readily available, its systematic assessment is not the research focus of this study.

POLICY FORMULATION ALONG THE DIMENSIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION POLICY. Another differentiation introduced in section 2.2 on implementation theory crucial for the case study research should be recapitulated at this point. When comparing policy change across HE systems, I distinguish between 'policy formulation along the seven dimensions' and 'implementation policy'. By 'policy formulation along the seven dimensions', I refer to the regulation that outlines the design of the new degree structures and its consequences for the other six

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[52] The converse holds true for policy implementation: it requires not only informal, but also formal change. In the course of the implementation process, a wide range of regulations have to be adjusted at different levels: always at institutional level, in some cases also at the regional level, and in neighbouring policy areas. In the case at hand, this includes examination rules, formal aspects of curricula and curricular governance, regulation linking HE to public and private employment, and the like.

dimensions. By 'implementation policy', I mean the degree to which a decision on the transition to the adapted degree structures has been taken at a national level. This also includes the mode of implementation insofar as it implies the degree to which a decision on implementation has been reached (that is whether implementation is left to institutions, imposed by law, or facilitated by government in a guided process). Implementation policy is different from implementation of the level of individual HEIs, which belongs to the sphere of actual change and is beyond the purview of this study. I distinguish the two aspects of policy change to account for the fact that they can fall quite widely apart. Radical policy formulation along the seven dimensions *per se* need not go hand in hand with straightforward implementation policies. Combining these two aspects into an overall judgement of policy change from the outset would therefore blur the analysis. This has implications for the comparative analysis, which is performed according to both aspects of policy change to prepare an overall judgement. The hypotheses are then reviewed with respect to overall policy change, but also taking into account the more complex picture behind the aggregate results.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS. The research objective of this study is to analyse policy change in European HE systems in the context of adaptations of degree structures, and in the course of the Bologna process. This formulation draws attention to two distinctions:

(1) not all policy change in European HE systems between 1998 and 2004 was related to adaptations of degree structures; and

(2) not all adaptations of degree structures necessarily took place in the context of the Bologna process.

The implied problems of attribution and delineation shall now be addressed. A great deal of change took place in the four HE systems in the period from 1998 to 2004. Given what I highlighted about the nature of Bologna process in the introduction to this study (that it bundled a range of existing reform trends under its flag (Neave, 2002)), I avoided the methodological trap of trying to disentangle change *caused* by the Bologna process from other change. Instead, I use two pragmatic criteria for delineating the scope of analysis:

(1) whether the change was directly related to adaptations of degree structures; and

(2) whether it was discussed in the context of the Bologna process in the respective country.

There was thus no need to disentangle the extent to which some of these reforms were driven by deeper underlying trends or other particular motives.

To enable cross-country comparison and the assessment of convergence, important changes in the seven dimensions that took place in the same period, but independent from the Bologna process, were included in the comparative analysis. In the tables summarising the results of the comparative analysis, these

are marked with an asterisk (*) to distinguish them from the other changes. Generally, they however were studied in less depth. An exception is the English case. As most policy change in the English HE system between 1998 and 2004 was unrelated to adaptations of degree structures or to the Bologna process, I gave somewhat more attention to it than in the other three HE systems. All policy change along the seven dimensions that took place in the period is traced, and I report policy change that occurred both within and outside of the context of the Bologna process in the comparative analysis.

NATURE AND DEGREE OF CHANGE. Methodologically, I assess the nature and degree of policy change by comparing the institutional setting of HE between early 1998 and autumn 2004, with particular attention to change in national regulations and attitudes of actors in national HE policy. By 'nature of policy change', I refer to the content and direction of reforms. Besides a qualitative assessment of the nature of change, the research aim of this study was also to compare the degree of change across HE systems. The degree of policy change being a relative concept, I could only judge it in an international comparison (see section 4.1, Step B: Cross-case analysis).

MEASURING THE DEGREE OF CHANGE. Comparing the degree of change across HE systems unavoidably yielded a 'ranking' regarding the distance travelled between 1998 and 2004. In particular, the assessment of the hypotheses required such a 'ranking' of the degree of change. I use the term 'ranking' in inverted commas to highlight that the position on the scale implies neither a normative judgement of the quality of change nor how advanced a HE system was in absolute terms. The analysis is presented as part of the cross-country comparison in chapter 10. To arrive at the results, I opted for the following process.

In step one, I analysed the nature and degree of change in each of the seven dimensions and the respective sub-dimensions and for each of the four HE systems. By comparing these changes to their respective initial conditions for each sub-dimension and country, I ordered them on a 4-point scale from low (L) through low to moderate (L-M) and high to moderate (H-M) to high (H). I fine-tuned these judgements by comparing them systematically across countries for each sub-dimension to account for the relative nature of the assessment. If the degree of change in two countries was about the same, the same position on the scale was assigned. The next step was to synthesize the results into an overall dimensional judgement of the relative degree of change, again using the same scale from low to high. This was not achieved by 'counting out scores' in sub-dimensions, but required a qualitative judgement of overall change taking into account the relative importance of changes in different sub-dimensions. Based on this analysis, for each dimension, I 'ranked' the HE systems using a numerical scale. I increased the validity of these judgements by triangulating them with published comparative studies and national experts. Both the numerical and the qualitative 'ranking' are reported in the first column of the respective

dimensional tables in section 10.2, preparing for the overall result discussed in section 10.3.1.

4.4.2   Actor-related concepts

Having discussed the operationalisation of institution-related concepts, I now turn to the actor-related concepts, namely key actors, actor constellations—consisting of actor capabilities, preferences and perceptions—and actor interaction. All these concepts are defined in the theory chapter.

Like the institution-related concepts, the actor-related concepts play different roles in the three steps of the research process. In the country case studies, the key actors in national HE policy are first put forth. The policy formulation process is presented in an integrated, chronological narrative, without making explicit dimensional actor constellations and stylised modes of actor interaction (step A). Following the premise that the explanatory factors can best be identified by means of a comparative approach, the systematic analysis of actor constellations and interaction is saved for the comparative analysis (step B). Here they serve as analytical lenses for the causal reconstruction of the nature and degree policy change. Finally, the hypotheses use selected aspects of actor preferences, perceptions, and capabilities to explain the degree of policy change (step C).

KEY ACTORS IN NATIONAL HE POLICY. What I refer to as actors are 'organisational actors' (see sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.2). Given that there is no single clear-cut criterion for identifying 'key actors in national HE policy', I opted for a pragmatic approach, taking into account (a) their relevance as representative organisations of important stakeholder groups, (b) their influence in the policy process, as well as (c) comparability considerations. Based on these considerations, I proceeded as follows:

First, I determined a range of potentially relevant actor categories, based on my practitioner knowledge of the German and other HE systems. This included the respective ministries in charge of HE[53], representative bodies of HEIs, academic staff, students, and employers, advisory bodies, quality assurance organisations, and international cooperation agencies. The role of disciplinary and professional organisations and that of other, national-specific actors was also considered. Next, I found out the names of the respective organisations in the different countries. The number of actors per category varied depending on the governance structure and interest representation in the respective systems. For example, in Germany there is a single national rectors' conference, but there are two in the Netherlands and the UK and more than three in France. I also checked

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[53]   For simplicity of reading and as it performs the functions of a ministry, the English Department of Education and Employment (DfEE), later Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is equally referred to as 'ministry'.

websites to find out whether these actors had published position statements on the topic. Then I asked a number of national experts whom they considered key actors in policy formulation on tiered degree structures; this also involved choices within actor categories. Based on a combination of my own research and expert judgements, I chose the organisational actors to include in the analysis, which also implied that I would try to conduct actor interviews with representatives of all of them. As a final check, I used the interviews to ask the actor representatives themselves how important they judged the role and influence of their organisation in the process, and to cross-check with them who they considered as other relevant actors. This confirmed the choices I had made.[54] Table 10.1 gives a complete overview of the actors considered in this study sorted by category (see comparative analysis, section 10.1). "Key actor" and "actor" are used interchangeably in the following.

I adopted the following procedure to identify respondents that could serve as proxies for the organisational actors analysed: First, I identified the proper interviewee(s) within each organisation. In line with the requirements of actor-centred institutionalism, I opted for the highest available representative(s) responsible for and involved in national policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures. Sometimes, this was the overall president or secretary general, sometimes a department head, and in a few cases an expert from the officer level. Identifying these people was a research task in itself that required consulting several national experts. Second, wherever possible I chose a representative who could cover the maximum number of years between 1998 and 2004, or at least was in charge during the crucial policy formulation period(s). Sometimes this required interviewing two to three representatives from a single organisation (see appendix C for the list of interviewees). Third, I asked the interviewees explicitly to speak in the name and from the standpoint of the organisation that he or she represented in the relevant period.

The definition and operationalisation of actor capabilities, preferences, and perceptions is provided in section 3.2.4; Scharpf (1997) is quite specific about these concepts. Therefore, here I largely confine myself to the actual proceeding in data collection and analysis.

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[54] Based on this analysis, I decided not to include my home-base organisations of CHE and CHEPS among the key actors. Regarding the CHE, I judge its influence on the process to be quite modest—perhaps with a single exception: in 2003, the CHE was one of the first actors to assume a clear position in favour of the complete transition to a Bachelor-Master structure in German HE through two position papers (Witte & Schreiterer, 2003b; Witte, Schreiterer, Hüning, Otto, & Müller-Böling, 2003). It can be argued that these contributed to the change of attitude observed around this period regarding the new degrees. Most interviewees agreed with this judgement; for those who disagreed, this was hard to distinguish from flattery with the interviewer. As for CHEPS, individual staff members played a role in the process through policy-related studies as secretaries to advisory commissions or providing policy advice themselves, but CHEPS did not participate in the process as an organisational actor.

ACTOR CAPABILITIES. To identify actor capabilities, I analysed the key actors' legal constituency and tasks, their internal structure, interest representation, decision-making processes and funding, their relationship with other actors, and their formal as well as informal role in the policy formulation process. I paid particular attention to their relationship with the constituencies they officially represent and the ways in which they capture and represent their views. To identify them in the concrete case, I triangulated information from primary data, HE literature, and both expert and actor interviews (see section 4.5 on 'data collection').

One selected aspect of actor capabilities, the capabilities of the national ministry responsible for HE, is used as explanatory factor in hypothesis III. I operationalise this factor as the capability of the national ministry to organise "negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy" (Scharpf, 1997). This builds on two conditions:

(1) that the ministry has the formal capability to impose regulation against the will of stakeholders as a credible fall-back option, and

(2) that the ministry is accepted as the leader of the national consensus-formation process by other actors in national HE policy.

ACTOR PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTIONS. In this category, I distinguish individual and predominant actor preferences and perceptions.

To identify the **preferences and perceptions of individual actors**, I relied on primary data wherever possible, i.e. official position papers and other public documentation such as speeches and articles of their official representatives, conference proceedings, notes of public hearings etc. As far as preferences were openly expressed, they could mostly be identified in these official documents. To somewhat lesser degree, this also holds for perceptions which could be inferred from the justifications given for certain positions, reference models cited, and the discussions referred to. I refined this data with information from the actor interviews. For this purpose, I specifically asked the interviewees for their perceptions and preferences regarding the seven institutional dimensions. I also asked them how they judged the relative influence of the national versus the European context on their perceptions and preferences (see appendix D for a general guideline for the actor interviews).

While I analysed the individual actors' preferences and perceptions for each of the seven dimensions, presenting all of them is beyond the scope of this study. Consequently, I had to confine myself to **predominant actor preferences and perceptions**. Here I refer to those actor orientations that are (a) conditioned by the general institutional setting rather than by the narrow self-interest or particular perspective of individual actors, and are (b) widely shared among them. I thereby integrate North's perspective into the concept, analysing how institutions shape actor orientations (see theoretical sections 3.1 and 3.2.4). For the **predominant actor preferences**, I analyse the incentives originating in the institutional framework that trigger them, particularly resulting from the problem pressure on the HE system that accumulated over previous years. For the **predominant actor perceptions** I describe the central concepts and reference points used to structure

the major discourses surrounding national policy formulation. Following my extension of North's model (see theoretical section 3.1.6), I pay particular attention to the role of the perceptions of the international context for national policy formulation. The terms 'actor preferences' and 'actor perceptions' are used as shortcuts for 'predominant actor preferences' and 'predominant actor perceptions'.

It should be noted that this conceptualisation of 'perceptions' will in many cases remain at the level of the general national reform discourse, which can be expected to be influenced by 'policy entrepreneurs' who seek to advance the reform and move it into a certain direction (Kingdon, 1984; North, 1990: 5). Perceptions and arguments can therefore be expected to be mixed.

Methodologically, I used the satiation method, starting with a literature review and primary document analysis and proceeding through expert and actor interviews to identify the prevalent debates, concerns, and perceived problems. In addition, I asked experts from the respective HE systems to double-check my analysis. As each of the seven dimensions constitutes a policy arena in itself—albeit interrelated with other dimensions—I performed the analysis for each of them.

I use aspects of actor preferences and perceptions as explanatory factors in the hypotheses (I) and (II). Hypothesis (I) captures the essence of the comparative analysis performed under the headings "actor preferences" for each institutional dimension, focusing on those actor preferences that are backed up by problem pressure from the institutional framework. This problem pressure is not measured on an objective scale, but based on the assessment by actors in national HE policy as expressed in primary documents and interviews. Hypothesis (II) focuses on the influence of the international context on actor perceptions, summarising the comparative analysis performed under the headings "actor perceptions" for each institutional dimension.

ACTOR CONSTELLATION. I use this concept in the comparative analysis to step back from the preferences, perceptions, and capabilities of the individual actors to draw a general picture. Following Scharpf's definition (see section 3.2.5), I focus on the *level of conflict* implied by the differences in preferences and perceptions between actors and their institutional capability of bringing their views to bear on the process. In line with Scharpf, I use the concept of 'level of conflict' in a neutral way, referring to the level of disagreement or divergence of interests among actors, not presupposing that the process was actually carried out in a highly conflictual way

ACTOR INTERACTION. In the individual case studies, I reconstruct the policy formulation process in chronological order, describing the full complexity of actor interaction and its evolution over time. In the comparative analysis, I focus on the *role of sequencing* for the ultimate policy outputs effected in the individual dimensions, incorporating the theoretical perspective of path dependence presented in section 2.5 (notably Pierson, 2000a). In the concluding section of the

comparative analysis, I identify the predominant interaction modes across dimensions, following Scharpf's distinction of unilateral action, negotiation, majority vote, and hierarchical direction (see section 3.2.5).

4.5   Data collection

In this section, I give an overview of the source and types of data used and the sequencing of data collection through the research process. Data from primary sources and secondary data was analysed for the purpose of this study, most of which was of a qualitative nature.

Published academic texts as well as policy-related studies in the HE field formed the basis for mapping the initial situation of HE systems in 1998. I complemented this information with quantitative data from the OECD ('Education at a Glance'). Where this was not available, I used national data. While there is some concern as to the comparability of data collection and definitions used by the OECD (see Teichler, 2000), neither relying exclusively on national data nor alternative sources of comparative data could compensate for these weaknesses.

Building on this initial analysis, I reviewed a multitude of primary documents to reconstruct national policy formulation processes on adaptations of degree structures. I gained access to these documents through online documentation, data bases, and direct contacts. In addition to national legal provision, I analysed government white papers, policy recommendations, reports of national advisory bodies and the like, official documentation of parliamentary negotiation, public hearings, and other formal stakeholder consultation. I studied position papers of national actors in HE policy as well as speeches and articles of their representatives. I also followed the national coverage in newspapers, HE-specific journals, and online newsletters. From the analysis of this data I reconstructed the national policy processes and evolution of national regulation and developed an initial understanding of the key variables of my theoretical framework, such as preferences and perceptions of major actors in the HE policy field.

To complement and qualify these findings, I conducted several sets of semi-structured interviews with experts and actors. Expert interviews were employed to structure and guide the research process and gain recommendations for certain key actors. Actor interviews were used to identify the preferences, perceptions and capabilities of major actors in national HE policy.

A first round of expert interviews helped me identify key issues, events, and actors in the respective policy processes. I conducted a second round of expert interviews during the writing process to clarify selected issues as they emerged from the analysis. The second type of interviews were held with the representatives of key policy actors (for the proceeding, see 'key actors in national HE policy' above). Altogether, I conducted 33 expert interviews and 62 actor

interviews (see Table 4.3 for an overview and appendix C for a list of interviewees).

I taped all actor and most expert interviews with prior permission of the interviewees. Most of the actor interviews were transcribed verbatim and some I took memory notes immediately after the interview. In conjunction with the document analysis, the transcripts and minutes serve as the basis for the analysis of actor preferences and perceptions (see appendix D for the interview guideline). They also serve to gain insight into some informal aspects of policy formulation that are not publicly documented. All verbatim quotes used in this study are authorised by the respective interviewee. The number of expert interviews per country is a function of my prior familiarity with the respective HE system. In the case of Germany, fewer formal expert interviews were needed given my antecedent context knowledge of German HE policy. In all countries, the formal expert interviews were complemented with countless informal exchanges with HE experts by email and telephone.

PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION. I collected data for this study in five main phases. Since summer 2000, I observed developments in the Bologna process as a practitioner at CHE. From autumn 2002 to spring 2004, and in parallel to developing my theoretical framework, I familiarised myself with the four HE systems using HE literature and primary documents. This was followed by a first round of exploratory expert interviews conducted by phone or in person in spring and summer 2004. Based on the insights from the expert interviews, another round of data analysis followed, looking more specifically at key policy documents. Based on this preparation, I conducted the actor interviews in summer and autumn 2004, spending two weeks each in the Netherlands, France and England. The German interviews were spread over a longer period through summer and autumn 2004. In the course of the data analysis and writing process from autumn 2004 to winter 2005, I continued to fill emerging gaps in the data. The phasing of data collection over time is summarised in the Figure 4.2.

Table 4.3: Actor and expert interviews in the four HE systems

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Actor interviews	20	12	16	14
Organisational actors covered	11 (+2 at *Länder* level)	10	10	7
Representatives from	*Akkreditierungsrat*, BDA, BMBF, DAAD, DHV, fzs, hlb, HRK, KMK, MWK (NRW), *Wissenschaftsrat*, Stifterverband, StMWFK (Bavaria)	Education Council, Education Inspectorate, hbo-*raad*, LSVb, MOCenW, NUFFIC, VAWO VSNU, NVAO, VNO-NCW	ADIUT, CDEFI, CGE, CPU, IUMM/MEDEF, La Fage, MEN (DES, MSTP), SNESUP, UNEF	DfEE/DfES, HEFCE, NUS, QAA, SCOP, Universities UK, UK HE Europe Unit
Formal expert interviews	5	7	12	9
Experts from	BMBF, Akkreditierungsrat, KMK	CHEPS, KNAW, NVAO, hbo-*raad*, University college Utrecht	CNE, CPU, CSO, CTI, Edufrance, IGAENR, *Université de Marne-la-Vallée*	CBI, DfES, HEFCE, HEPI, Lancaster University, QAA, Sheffield Hallam University, UK NARIC, UK Sokrates-Erasmus Council

Figure 4.2: Phases of data collection
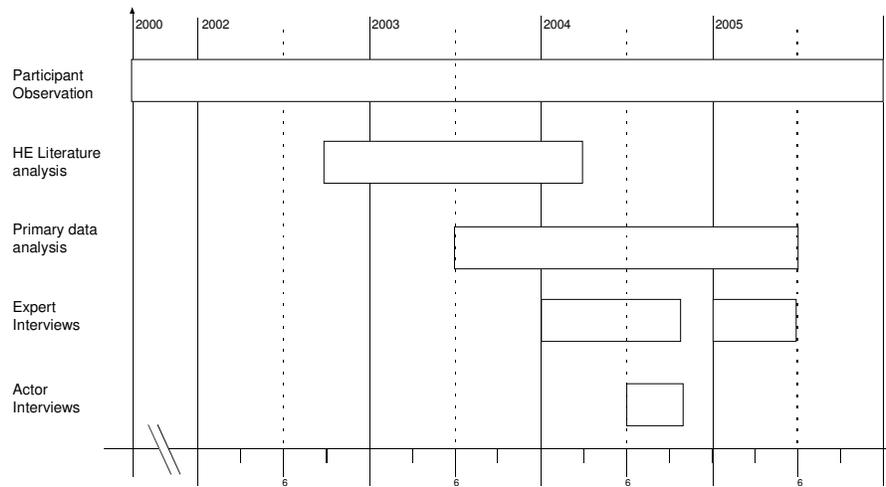
5 Europe

5.1 Introduction

At the centre of this study is national policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures in the course of the Bologna process. This chapter serves to present the European context for the ensuing national case studies. As explained in the introduction, the core of the Bologna process at the European level is a series of intergovernmental conferences of European education ministers at which programmatic declarations and communiqués were passed. This chapter is structured along these conferences, and pays only cursory attention to the events in between. It begins with the Sorbonne conference (1998)—widely recognised as important precursor of the process—and proceeds through the conferences in Bologna (1999), Prague (2001), and Berlin (2003). The Bergen conference (2005), which took place after the period of investigation, is also recapitulated. In analysing the declarations and communiqués passed at these conferences, I focus on the key theme of this study, namely the move towards two-cycle degree structures. Where applicable, I also take into account policy formulation (see sections 2.2 and 2.3 for my understanding of this term) on the other six thematic dimensions of this study: institutional types, curricular governance, curricula, access, transition to employment, and funding (see section 3.3 for more about these dimensions).

   As highlighted in the introduction, the intergovernmental nature of the Bologna process leads to a permanent two-way interaction between policy formulation at national and European levels. Therefore, European-level policy formulation cannot be treated as separate from national perceptions and preferences. It is unavoidable at times to jump ahead to national debates in order to understand how certain elements in the declaration texts came about. Nevertheless, the perspectives assumed in this and the following chapters are clearly distinct; while the national case studies investigate how national policy formulation was influenced by domestic and European factors, in this chapter I analyse how national preferences and perceptions shaped policy formulation at the European level.

   With the increase in the number of member states in the course of the process, this influence became increasingly complex and erratic. In the initial phase however, particularly the preparation of the Sorbonne declaration, it can still be traced back quite clearly. Therefore, and because the course for establishing two-tier degree structures as major reference point for the creation of a European HE area was set at this point already, I pay particularly close attention to the

formulation of the Sorbonne declaration. In the subsequent analysis, I show how the European dynamics of the Bologna process were characterised by a "snowball effect" (Zgaga, 2004: 105), involving the incremental enlargement from four initiators to 45 signatory countries by 2005, an increasing degree of institutionalisation and formalisation, and a broadening of the policy agenda with the subsequent addition of further targets. I also highlight the role of the European University Association's (EUA) 'trends reports' in providing orientation on patterns and trends regarding degree structures in Europe; thereby making an important contribution to policy formulation at European level.

It is explicitly *not* the aim of this chapter to give a complete account and analysis of the process at the European level.[55] Besides some background information to the Sorbonne and Bologna conferences, I do not claim to significantly advance the boundaries of research about the European-level process. Instead, this chapter focuses on those aspects of particular importance for national policy formulation on the reform of degree structures. To make up for the necessary confinement of this chapter, appendix B1 provides a somewhat more comprehensive chronology of related European-level events. In addition to previous studies on the topic, this chapter is based on a range of interviews with key actors active at both European and national levels (see appendix C1). For a history of European HE policy before the Sorbonne declaration, I refer to Corbett (2005) and De Wit & Verhoeven (2001).

5.2   Sorbonne declaration (1998)

In May 1998, the ministers in charge of HE in France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom signed a joint declaration on the "harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system" (Sorbonne declaration, 1998). This so-called Sorbonne declaration is generally seen as precursor of the Bologna process. It formulated the aim to create a "European area of HE" (ibid) through a set of measures such as a common two-cycle degree structure, the mutual recognition of degrees, and increased student mobility. Against the background of the history of European HE policy, the Sorbonne declaration constituted a quantum leap. How did this become possible?

The Sorbonne declaration was an initiative of French education minister Claude Allègre. Soon after coming into office in autumn 1997, Allègre developed the idea that he could use the approaching 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne as an occasion for a European declaration that he intended to use as a lever for

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[55]   In this respect, the reader is referred to other reports and studies (Friedrich, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Lourtie, 2001; Pitseys, 2004; Van der Wende & Huisman, 2004; Zgaga, 2004).

national reforms.[56] Allègre also hoped that by initiating European cooperation in HE as a 'bottom-up' initiative of national ministers responsible for HE, he could pre-empt similar ambitions of the European Commission and establish a cultural counterbalance to the dominance of economic motives in the European Union (EU). Towards this end, he first contacted the German minister responsible for HE at the time, Jürgen Rüttgers, then Italian minister Luigi Berlinguer and only a few weeks before the Sorbonne conference, English junior minister Baroness Tessa Blackstone.[57] These contacts reflect a selection of what the French considered *les autres grandes nations* (the other grand nations); they were also based on personal ties that Allègre had fostered in the Carnegie Group, a regular informal meeting of ministers in charge of research in the G8 countries (see also Ravinet, 2005b). As Ravinet demonstrates, the content and wording of the declaration text itself was developed at the officer level between the four participating HE ministries in a remarkably short period before the event.[58] In the following, I present the elements of the declaration text of particular relevance in the context of this study, and discuss their background and emergence.

Regarding the policy target of a common **two-cycle degree structure**, the Sorbonne declaration contained the same key elements that would later constitute the core of the Bologna declaration. It stated that "a system, in which two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognised for international comparison and equivalence, seems to emerge" (Sorbonne declaration, 1998). Interestingly, this policy goal was presented as an observation although the factual basis for it was quite thin at the time. So where did the idea come from?

As with so many ideas in this declaration, the concept of 'cycles' as such stemmed from the French policy context, where HE was traditionally thought of in three 'cycles' (DEUG, *maîtrise*, DESS/DEA, and doctoral studies). Only a few days before the Sorbonne conference, the idea of moving from a three- to a two-cycle structure of HE had been presented to the French public by a national expert commission under the leadership of Jacques Attali as a solution to a whole set of problems in French HE (Attali et al., 1998). At the same time, the German federal ministry in charge of HE was preparing a major overhaul of the national

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[56] 25 May 1998 was a somewhat arbitrary date chosen for the Sorbonne conference, as the exact date of the anniversary is not known to historians. Ravinet (2005a; 2005b) has shown how the occasion came before the idea and the idea before the content of the declaration.

[57] More precisely, Claude Allègre was the Minister for National Education, Research and Technology; Luigi Berlinguer was Minister for Public Instruction, University and Research; Tessa Blackstone was Junior Minister for Higher Education; and Jürgen Rüttgers was Minister for Education, Science, Research and Technology.

[58] While the president of the Confederation of European Rectors' Conferences was invited to the Sorbonne meeting and held a speech, and the declaration notes that "the conferences of European rectors, university presidents, and groups of experts and academics in our respective countries have engaged in widespread thinking along these lines", the content of the declaration was solely determined by the four ministers and their staff.

framework act for HE that, among other things, was to allow for the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes in addition to the traditional German degrees. In England, a tiered system with Honours and Masters degrees was already traditional. Finally, the Italian minister also saw the potential for a two-cycle structure to address a range of problems in the national HE system (see Ravinet, 2005a). I now look closer at the envisaged design of each of the two cycles.

For the **undergraduate phase**, the Sorbonne declaration explicitly stated a set of curricular ambitions that were widely shared, but resonate French HE reform efforts of the time particularly closely, namely that "undergraduates should have access to a diversity of programmes, including opportunities for multi-disciplinary studies, development of a proficiency in languages and the ability to use new information technologies". In retrospect, it is interesting to note that no mention was yet made of a possible labour-market relevance of the first degree; only the aim of "international recognition of the first cycle degree as an appropriate level of qualification" was stressed at the time.

Regarding the **graduate phase**, the four ministers agreed on the establishment of the Masters level as a common reference point. As Allègre remembers,

> the second thing on which we agreed was that in our European degree programmes, we needed to make appear the "Master". It did neither appear in Italy, nor in Germany, nor in France. Yet, the Masters was the most recognised degree[59] in the world. So we all established the Masters. In France, we introduced a degree called "Master" (Interview Allègre, 2004, own translation).

Regarding graduate studies, the declaration took up another idea from the French policy context, that "there would be the choice between a shorter master's degree and a longer doctor's degree, with possibilities to transfer from one to the other" (Sorbonne declaration, 1998). The conception of Masters and doctoral programmes not as a sequence but as alternatives, had also been expressed in the French Attali report (Attali et al., 1998).

In this context, a couple of issues that were subject to important misunderstandings in both European and in national debates later on should be highlighted.

First, it should be noted that contrary to what is often assumed in the national debates in Germany and the Netherlands, only the Masters degree was explicitly mentioned in the Sorbonne declaration; the term 'Bachelor degree' was not. The French version of the declaration text goes a step further, not even mentioning the

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[59]   As elaborated in footnote 202 in the French case study section 8.2.2, the French later distinguished between *diplôme* and *grade*, both of which are translated as 'degree'. In this quote, Allègre first uses the French term *diplôme* and then *grade*.

Anglo-Saxon concept of 'undergraduate' versus 'graduate', but speaking of "*deux cycles, pre-licence et post-licence*" instead.

Second, the Sorbonne declaration did not make any statement on the length of the first or second cycle. The frequent assumption that the Sorbonne declaration formulated convergence to a 3/5/8-model (equivalent to 3+2-or-5) as a common aim (Haug et al., 1999) can be traced back to the proximity of the Sorbonne declaration and the publication of the Attali report. In fact, the work of the Attali commission and preparations of the Sorbonne declaration overlapped, so that ideas from the commission influenced Allègre's thinking and vice-versa. Notably, the idea to restructure French HE into two cycles, following a 3/5/8-structure (i.e. licence, followed either by a Masters or a doctoral phase) was first formulated by the Attali commission. However, these specifications of degree length did *not* enter the wording of the Sorbonne declaration.[60] It is however true that an *informal* consensus that the undergraduate cycle should take three rather than four years of full-time study was reached between Allègre and Rüttgers prior to the Sorbonne declaration. As Allègre remembers, once the issue of length of degrees had been raised in the Attali commission,

> I started to talk about this problem with my European colleagues and notably with the German minister Jürgen Rüttgers (…). And he said: "It is good, but it must be done in three years." He had a very important argument. He said: "In Europe—in Germany or France—secondary education at the lycée is very long, so if we do the undergraduate in four years like the Americans, this would imply that our students are idiots and that they need more time than the others" [61] (Interview Allègre, 2004, own translation).[62]

This early preference for a three-year length of the first degree apparently influenced the further course of events, even if it did not enter the text of the Sorbonne declaration. Interestingly, the fact that the first degree in England, the *Honours*, traditionally took three years did not play a role in this argument: the focus was entirely on the US model.

The Sorbonne declaration made several other recommendations closely related to the two-cycle structure. Although it was formulated outside of the EU

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[60] Moreover, contrary to what its title ("Towards a European model of HE") suggested, the Attali report was a national report, launched independently—and before the idea—of the Sorbonne declaration. It was targeted exclusively at the French policy context and not based on any mentionable research effort with respect to European developments.

[61] As Allègre stressed at a conference marking the 40th anniversary of the CRE, "doing an undergraduate of four years would have meant to admit that our secondary education is less good than the American secondary education, which is not the case. We have therefore chosen the licence at three years after the completion of secondary education" (Allègre, 1999).

[62] Note that this discussion did not take place within the Attali Commission, which was formally independent from the Ministry, but informally between the two ministers.

context, it embraced the EU policy instrument ECTS for its potential to improve the flexibility of the system. However, it did not go so far as to recommend ECTS as the only credit system to be used. The declaration also recommended the use of 'semesters' to increase the flexibility of the HE system. This was another particular concern of French HE reform at the time, where the traditional structuring of courses and exams according to full academic years was seen to increase drop-out and impede student success and mobility. From the outset, the two-cycle structure was linked to the life-long learning and widening-participation agendas:

> This will allow for validation of these acquired credits for those who choose initial or continued education in different European universities and wish to be able to acquire degrees in due time throughout life. Indeed, students should be able to enter the academic world at any time in their professional life and from diverse backgrounds (Sorbonne declaration 1998).

The declaration stressed mobility, expressing the hope that "at both undergraduate and graduate levels, students would be encouraged to spend at least one semester in universities outside their own country" (ibid). Finally, the declaration endorsed the Lisbon convention on the recognition of degrees that had been passed a year earlier by the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES (1997).

The title of the Sorbonne declaration, "Joint declaration on the harmonisation of the European HE system", used terminology somewhat loosely, as the content of the declaration obviously did not aim at the creation of a common "European HE system" in the literal meaning of the term. Instead, the text itself expressed "the endeavour to create a *European area of higher education* [emphasis added], where national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other". It thus introduced the concept of the 'European HE Area' that would become so important later on, and clarified from the outset that the use of the term did no mean to call into question the diversity of national traditions.

A further linguistic detail is relevant in this context. The term 'harmonisation' which appears in the title of the Sorbonne declaration has a different meaning in French—the language of those leading the drafting process—than in English.[63] In French, *harmonisation* is clearly different from *unification*, the first implying convergence of different systems, and the second standardisation. The connotation of 'standardisation' associated with the English term 'harmonisation' was thus unintended and remained unnoticed in France, where the French version of the declaration was circulated. This becomes apparent from the following quote by Allègre:

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[63]   Although the draft was discussed in English, the mother tongue of the authors is important in this context.

> One must understand that this process was completely contrary to the European Commission's process. The European Commission wanted to bring about a uniformisation of degrees,[64] meaning they wanted to establish a European programme which would be the same everywhere. But we had all understood that if we would carry this out, it would fail to go through because people were attached to their degrees. So we said: "We need to establish *levels of equivalence* [emphasis added]." And this is a different process. It was about harmonisation—this is an important word!—and not uniformisation (Interview Allègre, 2004: own translation).

This highlights that Allègre's original idea behind the Sorbonne declaration was sufficiently modest and rough, namely to establish two internationally-recognised "levels of equivalence" without touching upon national degrees and the traditions enshrined in them. In a speech at the 40th anniversary of the CRE, Allègre confirmed this original intention "to look for levels which would be levels of mobility, without anybody abandoning whatever it was that they did" (Allègre, 1999: own translation).

The four ministers concluded the declaration by calling on other European countries in and outside the European Union (EU) to join their initiative and for "all European universities" to contribute to the fulfilment of their aims.

5.3   From Sorbonne to Bologna (1998-1999)

At the Sorbonne, the four ministers had already agreed that the Italian education minister Berlinguer would organise a follow-up conference in about a year's time. What they did not expect was the eagerness with which other European education ministers responded to the declaration and the dynamics resulting from it. Some of them followed Allègre's call to sign the declaration in the following year, but some—among them the minister of the Netherlands—also expressed disappointment that they had not been contacted before the Sorbonne declaration. As a result, it soon became clear that the Bologna conference would bring together a much wider range of countries than the Sorbonne conference, and that a new declaration text had to be formulated.

Other than the Sorbonne declaration, the text of the Bologna declaration was drafted by a group agreed within a meeting of the EU Directors-General of HE (Friedrich, 2005);[65] the so-called "steering committee"—the first obvious sign of

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[64]   As further elaborated in footnote 202 in the French case study, the French later distinguished between *diplôme* and *grade*, both which translate as 'degree'. Here, Allègre uses the French term *diplôme*.

[65]   This bi-annual conference had been set up in 1994 on the initiative of the German Director-General of HE, Hans-Rainer Friedrich, as an equivalent of the Directors-General meeting in vocational education. Different from the latter, it was jointly chaired by the European Commission and the

the beginning integration of the Bologna process into the EU framework. The committee was led by Austria, which held the EU Presidency at the time, and included France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and Finland (Reinalda & Kulesza, 2005).[66] The European Commission soon started to financially support—and thereby indirectly influence—the process: it funded a report on "Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education" (Haug et al., 1999) jointly prepared by the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE).

This 'trends report', which assessed areas of divergence and convergence of degree structures, provided an important basis for the Bologna declaration. Among others, it sought to clarify international confusion that had resulted from the French Attali report's assertion of the "existence (or emergence) of a (single) European model of higher education based on a sequence of studies and degrees of 3-5-8 years", concluding that "a model strictly following this pattern does not exist" (ibid: 10). Nevertheless, the report did observe "a high degree of convergence towards a duration of five years for master-level studies". Based on this and other observations, it recommended a "broad frame" to "serve as a common reference, while at the same time allowing for flexibility and differences in countries and subjects". This frame was structured as follows:

- "sub-degree level (certificate, diploma): 1 to 2 years worth of ECTS credits;
- first degree level (bachelor, honours, or other first degree): no less than 3, not more than 4 years worth of ECTS credits;
- master level: about 5 years worth of ECTS credits, of which at least 12 months worth of master-level credits;
- doctoral level: variable (about 7 or 8 years in total)" (ibid: 8).

While the report contributed to legitimising a certain diversity of national degree structures regarding length, it also made initial moves towards a clear framing of that diversity within commonly defined boundaries. It also introduced a method that would be followed by the ensuing trends reports: to deduce normative recommendations from the empirical observation of dominant trends.

Furthermore, the report made initial steps towards specifying the design of the first degree. In this respect, it stressed the need for the "introduction of new curricula", to open up "real possibilities on the labour market", as well as "formal accreditation" (ibid).

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education minister of the state currently holding the EU Presidency. Every alternate meeting, the European rectors' conference attended.

[66] Note that this was not a formal sub-group of the EU Directors-General (DG), but a group of a different nature, the formation of which was voted at a meeting of the DG group under Austrian presidency, and which then met independently from the DG group (Interview Ravinet, 2004).

By providing the information basis for the discussions on the text of the Bologna declaration, the representative organisations of European universities began to actively contribute to the process.

5.4 Bologna declaration (1999)

At the time of the Bologna[67] conference in June 1999, Allègre and Blackstone were the only ministers left of the original four. The ministerial responsibilities for HE had changed to Edelgard Bulmahn in Germany and to Ortensio Zecchino in Italy. While Germany held the EU Presidency at the time, it did not play a particularly important role in the preparation, and the German minister even delegated attendance of the conference to one of her secretaries of state. Anyway, the process had already moved far beyond the highly personalised setting of the initial phase and was subject to different dynamics, having become more institutionalised and bottom-heavy. Although the declaration text had been prepared by a group formed at a meeting of the EU Directors-General of HE (Friedrich, 2005), negotiations of certain phrases continued at the conference, reflecting the increased difficulty of forging consensus among the now 29 signatory countries. The European Commission, which had deliberately been kept out of the Sorbonne conference, sponsored the Bologna conference and was present as a guest, as were the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences and the CRE.[68]

The Bologna declaration formulated an entire set of goals, among them the aim to construct a "European Higher Education Area" (the title of the declaration), "to promote citizens' mobility and employability", to achieve "greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of HE", and to increase "the international competitiveness of the European system of HE" as well as its "world-wide degree of attraction" (Bologna declaration, 1999). Towards these ends, six "action lines" were adopted; a set of common targets of differing levels of concretion. Among them, action line (2) is of particular importance to this study. It took up the idea expressed in the Sorbonne declaration of a two-cycle structure:

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[67] The Bologna location was based on the coincidence of several factors, among them that it was the constituency of the Italian President, the oldest European university, and the place where the "Magna Charta Universitatum" had been signed in 1988.

[68] The "explanation" of the Bologna declaration published by the Confederation of the European Union Rectors' Conferences and the CRE (2000) in February included an interesting early analysis of the driving forces behind the process: "The declaration reflects a search of a common European answer to common European problems. The process originates from the recognition that in spite of their valuable differences, European HE systems are facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of HE, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and transnational education, etc."

> Adoption of a *system essentially based on two main cycles* [emphasis added], undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first-cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries (ibid).

The formulation of "two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate", and the idea that the second cycle could either lead to the Masters or directly to a doctorate degree echo the Sorbonne declaration. New elements were the specification of the minimum length of the first cycle and the requirement for it to be relevant to the European labour market. It should be noted that the declaration only stipulated the *minimum* length and that the statement on the labour-market relevance of the first degree was quite soft. The ministers refrained from any further specification of degree length as recommended by the first 'trends report' (Haug et al., 1999). Another element proposed by the 'trends report' that did not find its way into the final text was the inclusion of sub-degree level education of one- to two-years' length (such as the French DEUG and the planned English foundation degree) in the common framework. Other action lines included:

- Adoption of a *system of easily readable and comparable degrees*, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, (…)
- Establishment of a *system of credits*—such as in the ECTS system—as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits should also be acquired in non-HE contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving universities concerned.
- Promotion of [student and staff] *mobility* (…)
- Promotion of *European co-operation in quality assurance* with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- Promotion of the necessary *European dimensions* in higher education, particularly with regard to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study (…) [emphasis added](ibid).

Similar to the Sorbonne declaration, the document stressed that these action lines should be pursued "within the framework of national competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of university autonomy". Regarding follow-up, the declaration announced to pursue "the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competence on HE" (ibid), hinting at the intention to closely cooperate with the representative bodies of European HEIs. The ministers in charge of HE agreed to meet again in Prague in May 2001,

thereby stressing that they were serious about the full participation of non-EU countries from Central and Eastern Europe in the process.

Twenty-nine countries signed the declaration, (with two signatures each from Germany and Belgium to account for their federal structure): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. Fifteen of these countries were EU members. From the beginning, not only the chosen approach but also the regional reach clearly differentiated the Bologna process from regular EU activities. Nevertheless, the linkage with the EU was present and grew stronger throughout the process.

5.5   From Bologna to Prague (1999-2001)

Between the Bologna and Prague conferences, important steps were made towards the establishment of a formal structure to support the Bologna process. When the EU education ministers met in Tampere, Finland in September 1999, they agreed to create a *consultative group* and a smaller *steering group* (Lourtie, 2001), thereby laying the basis for what would become the Bologna follow-up group. The *consultative group* was initially composed of representatives of all participant states of the Bologna process plus the European Commission, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the CRE. In 2000, the group accepted the Council of Europe, EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) and ESIB (National Unions of Students in Europe) as observers.[69] Participation in the *steering group* was confined to representatives of the EU enlarged-troika countries (the current, previous, and the two successive presidencies), the European Commission, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the CRE. Between the major conferences, state representatives sent to these groups were mostly high-level or leading ministerial officials.

Among the many education-related activities of the European Union, the European Council in Lisbon[70] stands out as a particularly important event in the context of the Bologna process. It took place in March 2000, halfway between the Bologna and Prague conferences, and marked the beginning of what came to be

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[69]   EURASHE is the umbrella organisation of non-university HEIs in Europe. ESIB is the umbrella organisation of about 50 national student organisations in 37 European countries.

[70]   The European Council, informally called the European Summit, is a meeting of the heads of state or government of the EU, and the President of the European Commission. It should not be confused with the "Council of the European Union", which, together with the European Parliament, forms the EU's legislative arm, and to whom it provides high-level policy guidance. It is also different from the Strasbourg-based "Council of Europe", which has 41 member countries from inside and outside the EU and is Europe's oldest inter-governmental organisation.

known as the Lisbon process. At the meeting, the heads of state or government of the EU established the ambitious aim to render the European Union "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" by 2010 and stressed the "importance of education and training" in this regard (European Council, 2000a). The Lisbon European Council laid the ground for applying the "open method of co-ordination" for the first time to the field of education (Gornitzka, 2005); a method suited to build up a high level of commitment without exceeding the limited bounds of EU competencies in the education field (Scharpf, 2000b).[71] Given the similarities of aims and methods, the Lisbon agenda contributed to the convergence between the EU's activities and the Bologna process (Van der Wende & Huisman, 2004: 33-34). The Lisbon agenda was further developed at subsequent meetings of the European Council in Nice in December 2000—focusing on student mobility under the French Presidency (European Council, 2000b)—and in Barcelona in March 2002, where education became an explicit part and the Bologna process was directly referred to for the first time (European Council, 2002). From then on, the Bologna process became increasingly incorporated into the Lisbon process.

The role of the European Union in the Bologna process was further strengthened by the establishment of the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in March 2000, funded initially by the European Commission through the Socrates programme. This new network went back to the recommendation "on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education" adopted by the European Council in September 1998 (European Council, 1998). Membership in ENQA was open to quality assurance agencies, public authorities responsible for quality assurance in HE and associations of HEIs from the European Union, the EFTA countries that were parties to the EEA-Agreement, and countries associated with the Community programs for Education and Training.[72]

Shortly before the Prague meeting, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the CRE convened in Salamanca to merge, forming the European University Association (EUA). In the "Message from Salamanca" (EUA, 2001), the European universities—now jointly represented by the EUA—expressed their support for the Bologna process and their willingness to play an active role in "shaping the European HE area" (the title of the document), listing a number of principles for their participation as well as key issues from their perspective. Regarding the two-cycle structure, they noted "broad agreement that

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[71] This method "involves fixing European guidelines and timetables for achieving specific agreed goals, establishing indicators and benchmarks in order to compare best practice, translating European guidelines into specific targets and measures adapted to fit national and regional differences, and establishing mutual learning processes based on regular monitoring, evaluation and peer review of process" (European Commission, 2000a: 3).

[72] At the Prague meeting, ENQA changed its regulations to include all Bologna signatory countries.

first degrees should require 180 to 240 ECTS points [i.e. 3 to 4 years of full-time studies] but need to be diverse leading to employment or mainly preparing for further, postgraduate studies." They also conceded that "under certain circumstances a university may decide to establish an integrated curriculum leading directly to a Master-level degree" (ibid: 8). These statements were based on the second 'trends report' that the EUA had prepared as an input to the Salamanca and Prague conferences (Haug & Tauch, 2001). The authors of the report had observed that "the strongest trend is towards 3-year Bachelors, but there are many examples of Bachelors lasting 3-4 years". They also found that "Bologna has encouraged more diversity and more flexibility" (ibid: 6). In contrast to the last trends report, they did not make recommendations regarding the length of Masters degrees, as they did not observe "a similar effort towards convergence at the postgraduate level" (ibid: 6-7). Nevertheless, the quest for common patterns and convergence is apparent from both the first and second 'trends reports'.

From 2000, the European representative organisations of universities (since 2001 EUA), non-university HEIs (EURASHE), and students (ESIB) accompanied the Bologna process at the European level. To the extent that they were members of their European representative organisations, national representative organisations of these three groups were thus linked to and—to different degrees—involved in policy formulation at European level (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: National membership in EUA, EURASHE and ESIB

	Germany	The Netherlands	France	England[a]
EUA	HRK*	VSNU	CPU	Universities UK
EURASHE	-	-	-	SCOP
ESIB	fzs	LSVb, ISO	La Fage, UNEF	NUS

*For a presentation of the various organisational actors, see the country case studies. *As the* Fachhochschulen *are a member of the German HRK, they are indirectly represented by the EUA although they do not have university status. [a]Universities UK and NUS are UK-wide organisations, SCOP includes two members from Northern Ireland.*

For a more detailed assessment of European-level developments in the period between the Bologna and Prague conferences, see the Lourtie report (2001).

5.6   Prague communiqué (2001)

At the conference in Prague, the signature of Liechtenstein under the Bologna declaration was sanctioned ex post,[73] and three more countries—Croatia, Cyprus and Turkey—joined the process, making a total of 33 participants. Their ministers in charge of HE confirmed the six action lines from the Bologna declaration and highlighted certain points. Regarding the two-cycle structure, they noted that "some countries have already adopted this structure and several others are considering it with great interest." They also stressed that "first and second-cycle degrees can in many participating countries be obtained at universities as well as at other HEIs", thereby indirectly endorsing the provision of Masters degrees by non-university HEIs. Moreover, they endorsed the value of a diversity of profiles and orientation (Prague Communiqué, 2001: 2). Regarding the use of credits, ministers went a step further than the last declaration, stressing the need for compatibility with ECTS. With respect to quality assurance, they

> emphasised the necessity of close European cooperation and mutual trust in and acceptance of national quality assurance systems (…) [and called upon] the universities and other HEIs, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with corresponding bodies from countries which are not member of ENQA, to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice.

The ministers also passed three additional action lines, namely on

(1) *lifelong learning*: stressing the importance of the concept in the context of knowledge-based societies;

(2) *HEIs and students*: endorsing the active participation of universities, other HEIs and students in the Bologna process; and

(3) *promoting the attractiveness of the European HE area*: this action line stressed an aspect that had been included in the Bologna declaration but had apparently not received sufficient attention, namely to improve the attractiveness of European HE vis-à-vis the rest of the world. To this end, the ministers called for the development of "a common framework of qualifications" and "coherent quality assurance and accreditation/certification mechanisms" to enhance the "readability and comparability of European HE degrees worldwide" (ibid).

The ministers decided that the next conference should be held in Berlin in the second half of 2003 and adjusted the existing format of the structure ensuring

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[73]   Liechtenstein would have signed the Bologna declaration, but had simply been forgotten to be invited to the conference. This mistake was made up for in Prague.

continuity between the conferences. A Bologna follow-up group (BFUG) would be responsible for the ongoing monitoring and development of the process, including drafting the next communiqué and the organisation of a series of official Bologna seminars. A Bologna preparatory group (BPG) would be in charge of the planning of the next ministerial conference. The BFUG was to be chaired by the EU Presidency at the time, and composed of representatives of all signatory countries, new participants and the European Commission. The preparatory group was to be chaired by a representative of the country hosting the next ministerial meeting and would also include representatives of the previous two ministerial meetings, the current EU Presidency, two more EU and two more non-EU member states, and the European Commission. The communiqué also confirmed EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB as official consultants in the process. Together with the Council of Europe, they continued to participate in the BFUG and BPG as observers.

The new setting implied a completely changed status of the European Commission: only three years after the Sorbonne declaration, it had turned from that of an external observant into participant of the preparatory group. Moreover, the ministers explicitly stated their intention to draw on community programmes for the promotion of the Bologna process. They thereby officially acknowledged the existing close linkages stemming from the inclusion of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement in the Bologna agenda and the importance of the Commission's Socrates-Erasmus programme as "main mechanism" for their introduction (Zgaga, 2004: 94). The ministers' call upon ENQA as an EU-funded institution for the promotion of co-operation in quality assurance pointed into the same direction.

5.7   From Prague to Berlin (2001-2003)

In the period between the Prague and Berlin conferences, the Bologna process grew exceedingly complex, with more and more actors contributing actively through conferences, seminars, studies and position papers. I will only highlight the key developments, the Zgaga report (2004) gives a comprehensive overview.
A survey on Masters degrees in Europe (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002), published by the EUA in September 2002 as an input to the next big EUA conference—the Graz Convention of HEIs in May 2003—and ultimately the Berlin conference, was an influential contribution to policy formulation on the length of Masters programmes at European level. This report filled a vacuum in an open and uncertain situation without a defined convergence point in which actors within each national HE system were looking for trends and patterns in other countries. Based on a survey among official Bologna contact persons, national rectors' conferences, and NARIC/ENIC offices, the report concluded that "there is a dominant trend towards Master level degrees that require the equivalent of 300

ECTS credits, although examples of slightly longer and slightly shorter courses can be found". Based on this empirical finding, the authors recommended that

> the participants agree on the definition that a Master degree in the European HE Area required normally the completion of 300 ECTS credits [i.e. five years full-time study], of which at least 60 should be obtained at the graduate level in the area of the specialisation concerned. This would allow for the following patterns:
> (1) 180 credits Bachelor + 120 credits Master [i.e. 3+2 years]
> (2) 240 credits Bachelor + 90 to 120 credits Master [i.e. 4+1½ to 2 years], of which 30 or 60 may be waived in view of previous studies during the final Bachelor year, provided the minimum number of credits remain at graduate level.
> (3) 300 credits Master (integrated programme) (ibid: 7).

In other words, five years up to the Masters level, of which a minimum of 1½ years in a graduate programme, were proposed as the norm—unless it was assumed that more than 60 credits could be squeezed into a full academic year. This recommendation did not account for the traditional English or the emerging Dutch one-year Masters programmes. Although the report did not have any formal regulatory power and the recommendations were not included in any declaration of communiqué text, they did fill a normative vacuum at the European level and constituted a strong reference point.

Ten official Bologna seminars took place in this period, organised not only by national education ministries but also by other stakeholders. These semi-formal seminars developed into an important forum for international policy formation in preparation for the Berlin conference, and according to Zgaga, reflected the "snowball effect of the Bologna process" (ibid: 105). Given the unsystematic composition of participants and the inherent difficulties of synthesising seminar discussions, the results of these events did not have official significance; nevertheless, they served as important reference points for both international and national debates. For example, the seminar on Masters-level degrees in Helsinki in March 2003 was later frequently referred to by English actors to justify the maintenance of English Masters programmes of one-year length—different from the recommendations of the EUA report (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). In the conclusions of the seminar, it was stated that

> Bachelor and Master programmes should be described on the basis of content, quality and learning outcomes, not only according to the duration of programmes or other formal characteristics. [Furthermore,] while master-degree programmes normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits, the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at master level.

Finally, the participants conceded that "in certain fields, there may continue to exist integrated one-tier programmes leading to master degrees" (Conference on Master-level Degrees, 2003).

Since the Prague conference, the Council of Europe had begun to contribute intensely to the process, assuming an important role as a link between the participants of the Bologna process and other European countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Liechtenstein joined, bringing the total to 33 signatories. The European Commission played an increasingly important role through a range of directly- and indirectly-related initiatives, such as the funding of an EUA project on "quality culture" in HEIs, the TUNING project on the convergence of curricula in particular disciplines, the criteria for Erasmus World Masters programmes, the support of ECTS and later of Bologna counsellors, and the initiative to launch a discussion on the role of universities in Europe (European Commission, 2003). Among many important activities, the EUA produced a third 'trends report', which for the first time was based on a survey among European HEIs (Reichert & Tauch, 2003) and highlighted their active contribution to the process, as well as the need for better information and involvement of stakeholders. Regarding the two-cycle degree structure, this report for the first time explicitly identified the 3+2-structure as the dominant European model: "The most common pattern appears to be: 180 credits Bachelor and 120 credits Master" (ibid: 48).

5.8   Berlin communiqué (2003)

On 19 September 2003, the ministers responsible for HE from the 33 signatory countries met in Berlin. The conference was jointly hosted by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* (KMK). Seven new countries were admitted: Albania, Andorra, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia-Montenegro, and the Vatican, extending the circle to a total of 40 signatory countries.[74]

Instead of burdening the process with several new aims, the Berlin conference concentrated on consolidating and integrating prior achievements and making specific commitments for the next two years. Only one additional action line was added: "to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna process" (Berlin Communiqué, 2003) in order to improve the synergy between the

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[74]   In Berlin, the ministers agreed upon a change of admission criteria for new members. Future candidates had to be members of the European Cultural Convention adopted by the Council of Europe in 1954. Up to then, it had been sufficient for them to be entitled to participate in EU education programmes, such as Phare and Tempus (Friedrich, 2003).

European HE Area and the "European Research Area".[75] The ministers highlighted three intermediate priorities for the next two years:

(1) "to strengthen the efforts to promote effective quality assurance systems,"

(2) "to step up effective use of the degree system based on two cycles and"

(3) "to improve the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies" (ibid);

referring to action lines 5, 2, and a combination of action lines 1, 3 and 4 of the Bologna declaration, respectively. Regarding quality assurance (1), the ministers gave ENQA an official mandate

> through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the follow-up group to ministers in 2005 (ibid).

Regarding the two-cycle system (2), they committed themselves "to having started the implementation of the two-cycle system by 2005", to improve "understanding and acceptance of the new qualifications through reinforcing dialogue within institutions and between institutions and employers" (ibid), and to develop national qualifications frameworks with defined outcomes of the first and second-cycle degree.

Regarding recognition (3), the ministers promised to ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention before the Bergen meeting. Furthermore, they agreed that by 2005 every graduate should be supplied with a Diploma supplement free of charge.

The follow-up structure was again adjusted. The composition of the BFUG was maintained, but the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB were promoted from "observers" to "consultative members", together with a new consultative member, UNESCO-CEPES. The vice-chair was now to be held by the host country of the next ministerial conference, while the chair continued to be held by the EU Presidency. The BFUG was assigned the preparation of next ministerial meeting, formerly the task of the preparatory group. In addition, a BFUG Board was defined to "oversee the work between the meetings of the Follow-up Group", composed of the same chair and vice-chair as the BFUG, "the preceding and following EU Presidencies, three participating countries elected by the Follow-up Group for one year, the European Commission, and, as consultative members, the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB" (ibid). For the first time, the follow-up process was supported by an official secretariat, located at the host country of the next conference. This can be seen as

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[75]   The idea of the European Research Area was launched by the European Commission under Philip Busquin (European Commission, 2000b), see Huisman & Van der Wende (2004).

another indication of the increasing institutionalisation of the process. The secretariat was also commissioned to write the official general report for the next conference. The BFUG was charged with the task to

(1) co-ordinate a systematic "stocktaking" for the next conference, which was to be held in Bergen, Norway in May 2005;

(2) assist the development of a European framework of qualifications; including the exploration "whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework"; and

(3) monitor the ENQA project on quality assurance.

The BFUG's work programme also included facilitating another round of official Bologna seminars and several BFUG working groups.[76]

5.9   Since Berlin

After the Berlin conference, the Bologna process intensified and links with EU policies were strengthened further. In March 2004, the BFUG established a working group to carry out an evaluation study, referred to as "stocktaking" (Reinalda & Kulesza, 2005). It was based mainly on information from Eurydice (2005) and the national reports. Its methodology included a scoreboard based on progress in ten policy areas of the Bologna process.

With the EU enlargement of May 2004, 25 of the 40 participants in the Bologna process were now EU members. In an effort to speed up the progress achieved by ENQA, in October 2004 the European Commission proposed to set up "a European Register of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies" and let HEIs in Europe choose freely between the agencies in this register (European Council, 1998). It also suggested that governments should accept the assessment of these agencies as a basis for national licensing or funding decisions. This proposal was disputed, particularly in the UK. In November 2004, ENQA turned from a network into an association based on criteria for membership, thereby increasing the level of engagement of its members.

The third Bologna follow-up conference was held in Bergen, Norway in May 2005. While outside the purview of this study, I will briefly relate its main aims. The 40 signatory countries largely focussed on a mid-term review of the process, and set "goals and priorities towards 2010" (Bergen Communiqué, 2005).[77]

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[76]   This section draws on the official Bologna-Bergen website, www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Work_progr/1Prog_Back-Action-lines.htm.

[77]   The ministers based their conclusions on the 'stocktaking report' (BFUG, 2005). Other inputs to the conference were the EUA's fourth 'trends report' (Reichert & Tauch, 2005) and the ESIB report "Bologna with student eyes" (ESIB, 2005). Furthermore, ENQA presented the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA" (ENQA, 2005) and the BFUG the draft

Overall, the ministers concluded that "substantial progress" had been made in the three priority areas defined at the Bergen conference, but that it would be "important to ensure that progress is consistent across all participating countries". They therefore saw "a need for greater sharing of expertise to build capacity at both institutional and governmental level" (ibid).

Regarding the degree structure—which in the meantime included three cycles following the inclusion of doctoral studies at the Berlin conference—the ministers highlighted the need to remove "obstacles to access between cycles" and to "increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, including posts within the public service". They adopted the "overall framework for qualifications in the EHEA [European HE area]". For the first time, they also stressed the possibility for intermediate qualifications between the three cycles, thus acknowledging the more complex national realities. Importantly, the framework was based on "learning outcomes and competences" and allowed for "credit ranges in the first and second cycles" i.e., it did not make rigid prescriptions on programme length. Based on this common frame, the ministers committed themselves to develop compatible national frameworks for qualifications. They also called for close cooperation with the parallel initiative of the European Union to develop a framework for general and vocational education, thus making a first step towards the integration of these separate initiatives.

With respect to quality assurance, the ministers adopted the ENQA standards and guidelines", welcomed "the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review" (ibid), and highlighted student participation and international cooperation as priority areas for improvement. Regarding recognition issues, they reminded the eight member countries that had

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"Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA" (Bologna working group on qualifications frameworks, 2005), which had been commissioned at the Berlin conference. The EUA trends report was this time based on in-depth interviews in a wide range of European HEIs. With respect to degree length, the report noted that "the misconception that the Bologna process 'prescribes' in any way the 3+2 structure is still widespread". Nevertheless, it continued to observe that "3+2 is still the dominant model across the European Higher Education Area" (ibid: 12)—apparently hinting at the difference between empirical finding and the normative implications. More generally, the report concluded that "considerable progress has been made in introducing three-cycle structures [since doctoral education had been included at the Berlin conference] across Europe, although there are still some legislative obstacles to structural reform in a few countries fives years after signing the Bologna Declaration. Many institutions, however, have now reached the heart of the transition process. Structural change must be matched with proper redevelopment of curricula, and often this has not been completed. Confusion sometimes exists regarding the objectives of the first cycle degree (which many mistakenly regard as a compressed version of former long-cycle programmes) and in many cases there has not been adequate time for institutions and academics to address reforms in a comprehensive way and to benefit from the opportunities offered through restructuring the curricula" (ibid: 4).

not yet signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention to do so[78], and called for all countries to address remaining recognition problems, also through the ENIC/NARIC networks, including prior "non-formal and informal learning" (ibid). Overall, the ministers adopted more explicit language regarding specific national implementation deficits than in previous declarations and called more emphatically for the evaluation of progress in specific problem areas at the next conference. The document also established a number of "further challenges and priorities", including closer co-operation regarding the design of the doctoral phase, increased attention to the social dimension, student mobility and the attractiveness of the European HE area to other parts of the world.

This time, the follow-up structure was left unchanged, except for the admittance of three new consultative members: ENQA and the European representative organisations of employers and HE staff, UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe), and the EI (Education International) Pan-European Structure. Ministers agreed to continue stocktaking in the three priority areas and complement it by "comparable data on the mobility of staff and students as well as on the social and economic situation of students" (ibid), thereby taking into account the social dimension.

At the Bergen conference, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine were admitted as new members, adding up to 45 participants. San Marino and Belarus were the only eligible[79] remaining European countries that had not yet joined the Bologna process.

5.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have traced policy formulation at European level in the course of the Bologna process. I have shown that the European framework for two-cycle degree structures was developed at an early point in time and remained remarkably loose, as far as the official declarations and communiqués of the Bologna process are concerned. Already in the Sorbonne declaration, the course for a two-cycle degree structure as common reference point for a European HE Area was set. This declaration also included already the idea that the second degree should either lead to a Masters or directly to a doctorate degree. At the Bologna conference, two defining features of the first degree were added: that it should have a minimum duration of three years and be relevant for the European

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[78] At the time of the Bergen conference, these were Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Spain, and Turkey. Malta ratified on 17 November 2005, see http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty.

[79] Kazakhstan and Kosovo applied but were not accepted as they were "not signatories to the European Cultural Convention adopted by the Council of Europe in 1954" (Reinalda & Kulesza, 2005).

labour market. At later conferences, nothing substantial was added to this and nothing was changed, although the possibility of a direct track to the doctorate received far less attention than could be expected on the basis of the early declaration texts. I have also shown that the official declarations and communiqués until autumn 2004 do not mention the term "Bachelor", nor do they formulate a norm for the duration of the first or the second degree.

So formally, the framework for the two-cycle degree structure was only loosely defined at European level, leaving national actors ample scope for unique designs. If one looks at the accompanying discourse, however—at seminars, conferences and particularly at the EUA reports—the picture looks different. Already in the very early phase between the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations, the proximity of the French Attali report to the Sorbonne declaration supported the false perception that a 3/5/8-model (i.e. 3+2+3 years) up to the doctorate was somehow emerging as an European norm, or had been recommended as such. In the absence of a formally defined convergence point regarding degree length, the series of (trends) reports published by the EUA (Haug et al., 1999; Haug & Tauch, 2001; Reichert & Tauch, 2003, 2005; Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002) filled a vacuum. They developed an important orientation function, serving as common reference point. A pervading theme throughout these reports was the quest for common patterns and converging trends. From an initially diverse picture (Haug et al., 1999), these reports became more and more specific. The EUA survey on Masters degrees in Europe (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002) in September 2002 made a clear point that five years of full-time studies up to the Masters level were the norm, and that less than a 1½-year length for a graduate programme was unacceptable. In the third trends report, the 3+2-structure was then explicitly identified the as "most common pattern" (Reichert & Tauch, 2003: 48).

To conclude, although not justified on the basis of formal Bologna texts, the 3+2-model for the undergraduate and graduate phase played an important role in the European-level discourse if only as something to divert from. The role of this perception in national debates will be followed up more closely in the country case studies.

By means of summary, Table 5.2 juxtaposes policy formulation in the seven institutional dimensions and a selected range of key process attributes throughout the process. As the table shows, the declaration and communiqué texts touch directly upon several of the seven dimensions, but not equally upon all of them.

Table 5.2: Policy formulation at European level in the course of the Bologna process

Conferences / Issues	Sorbonne	Bologna	Prague	Berlin	post Berlin
Institutional types	-	-	Non-university HEIs explicitly mentioned	-	-
Degree structure	Two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, second cycle leading towards Masters or doctorate	Sorbonne +first cycle minimum of three years	Implementation progress noted, common framework of qualifications called for	"start the implementation of the two-cycle system by 2005", and develop national qualification frameworks	-
Curricular governance	-	European cooperation in quality assurance	Mutual trust stressed, call for co-operation more concrete (including ENQA)	ENQA mandate to develop standards, procedures & guidelines	ENQA standards adopted, European register of quality agencies called for
Curricula	Credits (ECTS), multi-disciplinary courses, foreign languages, ITC	Credits (ECTS)	ECTS compatibility	-	-
Access	Importance of openness for students from "diverse backgrounds" stressed	Completion of first cycle as condition for entry into second cycle	-	Importance of social dimension highlighted	Access to second cycle identified as problematic

Conferences	Sorbonne	Bologna	Prague	Berlin	post Berlin
Transition to employment	Importance of LLL stressed	First degree should lead to a qualification relevant to European labour market	LLL included as formal action line	Need for intensified dialogue with employers highlighted	Call to "increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, including posts within the public service"
Funding	-	-	-	Social dimension indirectly touches funding issue	Attention to social dimension stressed
Process attributes					
Signatory countries	4	29	33	40	45
Institutiona-lisation	Initiative of ministers.	EU HE Directorates involved. EC admitted as guest.	BFUG & BPG formed, + EC admitted as full member, + EUA, EURASHE, ESIB, and CoE as observers.	BFUG, BFUG board and secretariat. + EUA, EURASHE, ESIB and CoE promoted to official consultants, + UNESCO-CEPES admitted	+ ENQA, UNICE, EI admitted as consultants in BFUG

Conferences	Sorbonne	Bologna	Prague	Berlin	post Berlin
Process attributes					
Agenda	EHEA, harmo-nisation, two-cycle structure, mobility	6 action lines: readable and comparable degrees, two-cycle structure, credits, mobility, quality assurance, European dimension	+3 action lines: LLL, stakeholder parti-cipation, attract-tiveness of EHEA	+1 action line: inclusion of third cycle	

In this chapter, I have shown how policy formulation at the European level resulted from the increasingly complex interaction of the Bologna process signatory countries. In the following chapters, I turn the perspective around and analyse how national HE systems were affected by the European-level process and also by national institutional conditions and actor interaction. I first turn to Germany, before studying the Dutch, French, and English cases.

6 Germany

Like all case studies, this chapter is structured in four parts: an initial section introduces the major actors in German HE policy and their capability to influence policy formulation in the period from early 1998 to late 2004. The second and the fourth section are structured along the seven dimensions introduced in the theory chapter: they depict the German HE system before (early 1998) and after (late 2004) the reform of degree structures referred to as the introduction of Bachelor and Masters[80] programmes in Germany. The third section gives a chronological account of policy formulation on Bachelor and Masters programmes in the course of the Bologna process in this nearly seven-year period.

6.1 Actors and their capabilities

An important condition for HE policy-making in Germany between 1998 and 2004 was the federal system. The German constitution (Art. 75 *Grundgesetz*, GG) assigned the prime responsibility for HE to the 16 *Länder* ('state') governments; the Federal Government had only a limited framework competence for HE. This was exercised by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft, Forschung und Technologie*, BBWFT, and as of November 1998, *Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*, BMBF;[81] henceforth referred to as 'Federal Ministry'). At the *Länder* level, the assignment of the HE portfolio to the research, education or culture ministries varied.

The Federal Ministry's formal powers were confined to proposing changes to the 'Federal Framework Act for Higher Education' (*Hochschulrahmengesetz*, HRG; henceforth referred to as Framework Act or HRG) and to the 'Federal Act on Payment of Academic Staff' (*Professorenbesoldungsgesetz*) to Parliament, administering the federal needs-based student funding scheme (BAföG) and internationally representing German HE jointly with the *Länder* (Art. 23 GG). Among these competences, the preparation of amendments of the Framework Act was the most decisive. Before the legal provisions had an immediate effect upon higher education institutions however, each of the 16 *Länder* had to translate them

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[80] While the German speak of "Master" programmes (without 's'), I have opted for the more common English terminology unless I refer to a particular degree title generally indicated by inverted commas.

[81] The name and portfolio assignment of the ministry was altered with the change of government from the Christian-democrat/liberal coalition to the social-democrat/green coalition in November 1999. The BMBF was structured into nine divisions, of which Higher Education and Continuing Education was one.

into their respective Higher Education Acts (*Landeshochschulgesetze*) or other forms of legal provision. The *Länder* tended to do so at different speeds and specify the Framework Act in different ways, so that there were effectively 16 different legal contexts for HE in Germany.

To achieve a certain degree of coherence between the different *Länder*'s education policies, including HE, their education ministers met in the 'Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany' (*Kultusministerkonferenz*, KMK).[82] This coordination was a major logistic effort, and the KMK secretariat comprised about 230 staff members.[83] While KMK decisions and guidelines had no formal legal significance,[84] they reflected the minimum consensus between 16 *Länder* and tended to be highly influential. Normally, they were translated with no or only minor adjustments into *Länder* policies.

From 1998 to 2004, the competences of the Federal Ministry were subject to permanent dispute with the Länder, who questioned the level of detail that could be specified in the Framework Acts, and whether changes to it were subject to their consent (*Zustimmungspflichtigkeit*). International representation was another line of conflict, since national views were not always well coordinated and many international issues touched upon national political debates.[85] Recent years saw a tendency among the *Länder* to interpret each policy initiative of the Federal Ministry as interference in their affairs.[86] Accordingly, the 'Commission for Education Planning and Research Promotion' (*Bund-Länder Kommission für*

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[82] Art. 9.2 HRG states that the *Länder* "jointly take care that the equivalence of the respective programme and examination achievements and the possibility to change HEIs is being ensured".

[83] The KMK plenary elected a board in accordance with a rota system; its president chaired the plenary meetings and represents the KMK externally, but had little decision-making power. The consensus-building process among the *Länder* was facilitated by the KMK secretariat and took place in a number of standing commissions and committees.

[84] They did however serve to fulfil the obligations of the *Länder* according to Art. 9.2 HRG, see footnote 82.

[85] Two examples: (1) In October 2000 the Federal Audit Court (*Bundesrechnungshof*) ended the BMBF-financed DAAD programme 'internationally-oriented degree programmes' ('*international ausgerichtete Studiengänge*'); arguing that it constituted undue interference of the Federation into *Länder* matters because the Master programmes financed by the programme actually brought about structural change (*Bundesrechnungshof*, 2000). (2) In late 2004, the Land Hesse filed a constitutional court case against the BMBF-sponsored HRK-programme "Bologna Center of Excellence", based on the same argument (idw, 2005b).

[86] In a recent ruling, the Federal Constitutional Court effectively nullified the introduction of the *Juniorprofessor* (similar to the assistant professor) in conjunction with the abolition of the traditional post-doc qualification—the so-called *Habilitation*—by the Federation, because it was judged to constitute undue interference with *Länder* competencies (*BVerfG*, 2004a, 2004b). A commission for the reform of federalism that was set up by the Federal Assembly (*Bundestag)* and the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) in October 2004 to work out a clearer role distribution between the *Länder* and the Federation in all policy areas fell out in November 2004 over HE and ended the work unsuccessfully.

Forschungsförderung und Bildungsplanung, BLK), originally set-up by the Federal Government and the *Länder* to coordinate their policies, did not play an important role in policy formulation.

Similarly, the Federal and Länder Parliaments—while they formally needed to pass changes to the HRG and *Länder* HE acts, respectively—were not practically important for policy formulation. One reason might be that any draft act that reached the Federal Parliament was already the result of painstaking negotiations with the *Länder*; members of Parliament thus feared that any changes at this stage would endanger the entire negotiated result. Conversely, once the amendments reached the *Länder* level, they had often already been debated at length nationally and within the KMK.

The *Wissenschaftsrat* ('Science Council', WR)[87] stood out as an important advisory body in HE policy. It brought together high-ranking representatives from academia with those from Federal and *Länder* governments and thus functioned both as an "instrument of cooperative federalism" and as a "mediating body (…) between scientists and policymakers" (Wissenschaftsrat, 2004b). The WR's recommendations generally paved the way for major changes in the general direction of HE policy.

Another relevant semi-public actor was the German Academic Exchange Service (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*, DAAD), the organisation responsible for the promotion of international co-operation in education. Formally organised as an association of HEIs and other stakeholders, the DAAD was the BMBF's main funding vehicle for projects to promote the international attractiveness of German HE, and played an important role in bringing about internationalisation-related structural change.[88] The DAAD also was an attractive partner for state actors in policy formulation for its international experience.

Stakeholder involvement in Germany was generally impeded by the federal system, which absorbed many negotiation resources. While the Federal Ministry did maintain a regular informal dialogue with a wide range of national actors, the outcomes were not channelled directly into policies due to its limited capabilities. Within the KMK, most energy and time was spent on reaching a consensus among the *Länder*, and it was structurally difficult to account for stakeholder interests in that process—although the KMK did maintain a regular dialogue with the *Wissenschaftsrat*, the HRK (see below) and a range of other partners. While stakeholder dialogue took place 16-fold at *Länder* level, it was not suited to forge national consensus. Also, by the time policies were translated into concrete

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[87] While 'Science Council' is a possible translation of '*Wissenschaftsrat*', the German term '*Wissenschaft*' encompasses much more than 'science', namely both sciences and humanities, and both research and HE. Therefore, following the practice of the WR, the German term is used throughout this study.

[88] This role was not undisputed, see footnote 85.

measures at *Länder* level, major directions had normally been set through the—albeit blurred—national discussion.

That having been said, the major stakeholders shall nevertheless be presented. Among them, the German rector's conference (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz*, HRK) stood out as the single organisation representing the interest of state and state-recognised universities, *Fachhochschulen* (the main form of non-university HE in Germany) and other HEIs in Germany at national level (see section 6.2.1. on 'institutional types'). It united the vice chancellors (*Rektoren* or *Präsidenten*) of these HEIs.[89] While the formal role of the HRK was limited,[90] it was the publicly recognised voice of HEIs in Germany, and its board maintained a regular dialogue with the KMK and the Federal Ministry. The degree to which it was consulted in policy formulation varied over time.

Whereas the HRK represented the institutional interest of all German HEIs, the interests of academic staff of universities and *Fachhochschulen* were represented by two separate associations: the union of university academics (*Deutscher Hochschulverband*, DHV) and the union of academics of *Fachhochschulen* (*Hochschullehrerbund*, hlb). Predominantly trade unions of academic staff, the capabilities of the DHV and the hlb to influence policy formulation on issues other than personnel was rather limited, but they were the relevant national actors to capture the perceptions and preferences of academics.[91] The DHV cooperated closely with academic subject networks (*Fakultätentage and Fachbereichstage*, and their umbrella organisation, the *Allgemeiner Fakultätentag*, AFT) to aggregate their opinions.

Student interests were represented by the national union of students (*freier zusammenschluß von StudentInnenschaften, fzs*), which had recently developed from a non-representative left-wing splinter group to *the* national umbrella organisation of local student organisations. While the fzs did not receive public funding and had no legal role in the formulation of HE policy at the national level, it became increasingly recognised between 1998 and 2004 as the legitimate students' voice by other actors.[92]

Employer interests were represented by the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (*Bundesvereinigung der deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände*, BDA) and an association of industry foundations (*Stifterverband für die deutsche*

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[89] Each *Land* in turn had its own conference of vice chancellors at that level.

[90] …to participation in the coordination of examination and programme regulations according to Art. 9 HRG…

[91] The majority of academics at German universities and *Fachhochschulen* are called 'professors' (*Professoren),* this however includes personnel categories which in other systems would be called 'lecturers' or the like.

[92] Via the membership of local student associations, it indirectly represented the interests of about half the students enrolled in German HEIs. The fzs was also the German member of ESIB. Other national student organisations, such as the party-affiliated groups, did not get actively involved in the Bologna process.

Wissenschaft). As in the case of the HRK, the formal obligation to involve employer associations into HE policy making was limited.[93] The BDA[94] was consulted however when employer involvement was sought by the political bodies. The *Stifterverband* influenced HE policy indirectly through funding the promotion of best practice and fostering dialogue between industry and politics.

Another actor was constituted in the course of policy formulation of two-cycle degree structures. In December 1998, the Akkreditierungsrat (*Accreditation Council*, AR)[95] was set up jointly by the KMK and the HRK as the supervisory body for a new quality assurance system, but soon developed informal influence in policy formulation. Initially created for a trial period of three years (see KMK, 1998), the AR was only permanently established in early 2003,[96] and its legal basis remained unclear throughout the period. Its board included a varying number of representatives of the Länder, HEIs, employers and students.[97] Attached to the KMK with a secretariat of three full-time staff and an annual budget of around €225,000,[98] its organisational capability was limited.[99]

6.2 Institutional setting in early 1998

This section depicts the key attributes of the German HE system and summarises the prevalent reform debates in 1998.

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[93] …to the coordination of examination and programme regulations according to Art. 9 HRG.

[94] …and, to a lesser extent, its sister organisation BDI—the umbrella organisation of German industry…

[95] While 'Accreditation Council' is the literal translation, I follow the practice of the AR and use the original German term.

[96] See KMK decisions from March and May 2002 (KMK, 2002a, 2002c), effective from January 2003.

[97] From early 1999 to early 2003, the AR was composed of 14 members: four academics, four representatives from the employment system, 2 *Länder* representatives, one head each of a university and a *Fachhochschule*, and two students. From early 2003 to early 2005, the AR was composed of 17 members: four *Länder* representatives, four HE representatives, five representatives from the employment system, two students and two international members.

[98] In the KMK decision that set up the AR, it was stipulated that the costs of the secretariat could not exceed DM450,000 p.a. (€230,081), of which the *Stifterverband* would contribute DM350,000 (€178,952) in the first three years. The small size and budget of the accreditation council were a reflection of the difficulty to get KMK agreement on the new curricular governance system as well as the strong intention to avoid by all means the creation of another huge bureaucracy.

[99] With the transfer into a foundation under North-Rhine Westphalian law, the AR moved into the premises of *Universität Bonn*. The composition of the new foundation's supervisory council (*Stiftungsrat*)—six *Länder* representatives, five representatives of the HRK—reflected the fact that the ultimate responsibility for curricular governance according to Art. 9 HRG still rested with the *Länder*. The AR now had a board, which consisted of the President, the Vice-President and the Executive Director The only change with respect to the composition of the AR itself with the transfer to a foundation was the addition of a representative of the agencies.

6.2.1   Institutional types

The German HE system in early 1998 was characterised by an institutional dichotomy between universities and *Fachhochschulen* (the major type of non-university HEI in Germany, abbreviated as FH). Of the 257 HRK member institutions, 82 were universities and 121 were *Fachhochschulen.* The 54 other HEIs consisted of 38 colleges of Arts and Music with university status, six teacher-training colleges in Baden-Wurttemberg, nine church-run institutions, and a private university (HRK, 1998b: 289).[100]

The *Fachhochschulen* had been created in the late 1960s, mostly from existing engineering colleges or business academies (*Ingenieurhochschulen, höhere Wirschaftsfachschulen*) to cater to increasing student demand through applied degree programmes. These were to be offered by a type of institution that was supposed to maintain close links with business and be staffed with lecturers that held doctorates and were also practically experienced. They had to teach more than university lecturers and were paid less.

However, the political plan to channel the majority students into the FH sector did not work out for a variety of reasons (Wissenschaftsrat, 2002a). Instead, the university sector continuously expanded without adequate funding and organisational or curricular changes. This was the consequence of a far-reaching political decision of the Federal and *Länder* governments in 1977 (*Öffnungsbeschluss*) to open up universities without providing adequate funding. They falsely assumed that the high student numbers of the late 1970s and the 1980s were only transitory (*Regierungschefs von Bund und Ländern,* 1977). As a consequence, universities soon turned into mass institutions with high drop-out rates; a situation exceedingly at odds with universities' self image to provide excellence and a close connection between teaching and research (see also G. Turner, 2000).

Contrary to political intention, only 24% of students were enrolled in the FH sector in early 1998; the remaining 76% were in universities (*Wissenschaftsrat*, 2002a:218).[101] This distribution resembled a 'reversed pyramid'. FH capacities in many subjects were so limited that stricter grade point averages (GPAs) were imposed as entrance prerequisites (*numerus clausus*) in the 1980s than in corresponding university programmes.[102]

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[100]   The data is from 31 December 1997; it changed only marginally until 31 December 1998. Universities include technical universities, educational universities (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) and *Gesamthochschulen.*

[101]   I have counted universities (66.4%), *Gesamthochschulen* (8%) and *Colleges of Arts* (1.6%) under universities, and *Fachhochulen* (21.9%) and administrative *Fachhochschulen* owned by the Federation and the *Länder* (2.1%) under *Fachhochschulen.* The numbers are from the Federal Statistical Office for Winter semester 1997/98.

[102]   Among others, this resulted from the failure to implement the *Wissenschaftsrat*'s recommendation to move certain subject areas from universities (such as teacher training, pharmacy, and law) and

The relationship between the two types of HEIs remained far from clear. In official jargon, universities and *Fachhochschulen* had always been 'different, but on a par'; with universities focusing on basic and applied research and offering research-oriented degree programmes up to the doctoral level, and *Fachhochschulen* offering professional education to a level roughly located between Bachelor and Masters, as well as conducting applied research. In practice however, a status hierarchy between the institutions was never fully overcome. From their inception, the *Fachhochschulen* struggled for 'equal opportunity' with the university sector; this coincided with a general paradigm shift towards competition and market-based differentiation of individual HEIs over the legally-defined role description underlying the binary system (Müller-Böling, 2000). The FH sector was able to garner some sympathy with political and economic elites, as it stood for cost-effective education and training of some practical value (Rüttgers, 1997). Taken together, by 1998 it had became a widely-shared idea that the FH sector should be upgraded, permeability between the institutional types increased, vocational links of university education enhanced and the overcrowded universities unburdened (KMK, 1996; *Wissenschaftsrat*, 2000a).

6.2.2 Degree structure

Traditionally, German universities awarded three main types of degrees leading directly to the Masters level; *Diplom*; *Magister*; and *Staatsexamen* ('state exam'), with a *Kirchliches Examen* ('divinity exam') for Theology. *Fachhochschulen* awarded only one degree, the *Diplom (FH)*, roughly located between the Bachelor and the Masters level.[103]

Among these degree types, the *Staatsexamen* had the longest tradition. It was a degree granted directly by the state, meant as an entrance exam for higher civil servants (teachers, lawyers) and/or for state responsibility in fields like medicine and pharmacy. Curricula were traditionally tiered, with a first *Staatsexamen* completing a period of university studies, and a second *Staatsexamen* completing an internship period. The state yielded a high level of control over curricula and final exams. The organisation of the *Kirchliches Examen* was analogous, with control exerted by the church instead of the state.

The *Diplom* was originally introduced as a professional degree in technical and science subjects at the end of the 19th century. Since then, it had spread to a range of subjects as diverse as economics, education, sociology or the arts. In these subjects, too, it still signalled a certain degree of professional orientation. The

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from the vocational training system (such as nursing and early years education) to the *Fachhochschulen*.

[103] Of course, these equivalencies were judged differently by different people, but the description is in line with the view of the HRK (1997) and the later statement of the KMK (1999).

engineering profession in particular, had come to view the *Diplom* as a signal for high quality standards.

While originally offered only at universities, the *Fachhochschulen* were also given the right to award a *Diplom*, with the accretion '*FH*' in brackets to signal that it was not the same as a university Diplom. In certain subjects such as engineering and business administration, students had the choice between studying for a *Diplom* at university or a *Diplom (FH)* at a *Fachhochschule*; the latter often associated with a more practical, less scientific bent.

The *Magister Artium* (henceforth referred to as *Magister*) was introduced after World War II in the humanities and some social sciences as an academic credential for students who did not want to become teachers. However, the degree was never well established in the labour market, but rather became a beacon for the unstructured 'Humboldtian' tradition of liberal arts at German universities.

In terms of scheduled length, most university degree programmes took nine and most FH degree programmes eight semesters, the latter often including two internships. But there was considerable variation in scheduled length with the *Staatsexamen* varying from six (primary teacher training) to 13 semesters (medical studies, including internships), *Diplom* programmes from eight to ten semesters, *Diplom (FH)* programmes from seven to eight semesters, and *Magister* programmes taking nine semesters.[104]

Traditionally, it was uncommon in Germany to return to university for a degree other than the doctorate once graduated. Consequently, the continuing-education sector at postgraduate level was not very developed. Apart from various non-degree courses, only a limited number of postgraduate two-year programmes existed, traditionally leading to a *Diplom* degree. Additionally, a range of pioneering Masters programmes had been created, stemming from different contexts, such as:

(1) individual reform initiatives such as the introduction of a three-year *Bakkalaureus Artium* and a two-year *Magister Artium* in the humanities at *Ruhr-Universität Bochum* in 1993 (Welbers, 2001);

(2) DAAD-supported Masters programmes, many targeted specifically at graduates from developing countries; and since early 1997, more widely at increasing the international attractiveness of German HE under the programme '*Auslandsorientierte Studiengänge* (AOS)' (DAAD & HRK, 2001);

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[104] Specifically, the scheduled degree length expressed in numbers of semesters varied among the *Länder*, but broadly speaking was as follows: primary teaching: 6-7, primary and lower secondary teaching: 7-9, upper secondary teaching: 9, special needs teaching: 8-9, law: 9, pharmacy and food chemistry: 8-9, dental and veterinary medicine: 11 semesters, medicine: 13 (KMK, HRK, & BMBF, 2005: Appendix 1). See *Wissenschaftsrat* (2001; 2002c) for a more detailed split.

(3) Masters degrees offered by *Fachhochschulen* and validated by British universities (an indirect reference to this practice was made in Rüttgers, 1997).

While the traditional German degree structure was one-cycle and characterised by the parallel existence of longer programmes in universities and slightly shorter ones in *Fachhochschulen*, two-cycle structures were not without history. In 1996, the *Wissenschaftsrat* recommended the introduction of short degrees (Wissenschaftsrat, 1966). Since then, the need for a fundamental reform of degree structures was discussed over and over in various forms (G. Turner, 2000: 111 ff.). The major reform initiative in the late 1960s and early 1970s to introduce *Gesamthochschulen* ('common HEIs') was but one of the efforts to address the problem. *Gesamthochschulen* were conceived as an institutional type encompassing university and FH features and offering two-cycle degree programmes (at that time referred to as *Diplom I* and *Diplom II*). For different reasons, the reform failed (Ladislav Cerych & Paul Sabatier, 1986; G. Turner, 2000: 92 ff.). In the early 1990s, another largely unsuccessful joint attempt was made by the *Länder* under the heading '*Studienstrukturreform*' (KMK, 1993), then defined as "the reform of the first cycle and its demarcation from further cycles, including accompanying measures regarding both students and teachers" (KMK, 1996).

6.2.3   Curricular governance

Basically, it was completely in the hands of the 16 individual *Länder* to provide for HE. Federal legislation however, should ensure "the equivalence of programme and examination achievements and degrees and the possibility to change HEIs" [own translation] throughout Germany (Art. 9 HRG). Moreover, with the principle of "freedom of research and teaching" (Art. 4 HRG) constitutionally granted (Art. 5 *Grundgesetz*, GG) individual academics and institutions had considerable leeway as to the content and method of teaching. Hence, the traditional curricular governance in German HE combined authorisation of programmes through *Länder* ministries based on a control of input measures such as teaching capacities, contact hours, rooms and the like; as well as a system of national subject-specific curriculum frameworks (*Rahmenprüfungsordnungen*, RPOs) on the one hand, and distinct autonomy of HEIs and individual academics on the other. Prior to 1998, a broad consensus had developed that the system of RPOs should be abandoned to allow for more diversity and innovation in degree programmes (Interview Erichsen, 2004; Interview Fangmann, 2004).

6.2.4   Curricula

A typical traditional university programme design in Germany would include four semesters of subject-specific, broad introductory and foundation studies

(*Grundstudium*) finished by a series of interim exams (*Zwischenprüfung*), followed by four semesters of deepening and advanced studies (*Hauptstudium*). The programme was completed by another series of final exams and a major thesis of about 100 pages which would typically take a semester to write. Curricula at *Fachhochschulen* had a similar structure, except that the deepening studies took one less semester and the programmes typically included several work placements. The final thesis was also often produced in a work-based arrangement. Workload would be counted in terms of weekly contact hours (*Semesterwochenstunden*, SWS). While volumes of obligatory courses, electives, and free electives were normally specified, the concepts of 'modularisation' and 'credits' were alien to the system.

Generally, curricular culture in German HE was a double-sided coin: on one side it was reputed for the thoroughness of foundation studies in the first two years, a high degree of freedom and self-determination for students in putting together individual programmes at their own discretion, and some course content links to professors' individual research interests even in the first two years. On the flipside, these features contributed to high rates of students changing programmes[105] or dropping completely out of HE (the latter amounting to 23% in 1999 according to HIS (2005:16); 24% at universities and 20% at *Fachhochschulen*).[106] They also led to a large gap between *de jure* and *de facto* length of studies (an average of 6.7 years to the *Diplom*, *Magister*, and *Staatsexamen* degrees at universities in 1997; up to 5.5 years to *Diplom (FH)* at the *Fachhochschulen* (Wissenschaftsrat, 2000a:106/131))[107] (see also G. Turner, 2000: 111 ff.).

Of course, this sweeping statement has to be differentiated by degree types, subjects, and institutional types; delineations which partly overlap. Broadly speaking, FH programmes tended to be more structured than university programmes, *Diplom* and *Staatsexamen* tended to be more structured than *Magister* programmes, and programmes in science and engineering tended to be more structured than those in the humanities, with social sciences assuming an intermediate position. Examples for the idea of free, long-lasting Humboldtian studies (*Humboldt'sches Langzeitstudium*) were more frequent in *Magister* programmes in the humanities and in some social sciences than in *Diplom* programmes. The latter were mostly single-subject courses such as Physics,

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[105] 9% of beginners planned to change subjects and 13% to change HEIs in the first semester according to Lewin et al, HIS, in *Wissenschaftsrat* (2004a: 19).

[106] The drop-out quote calculated according to the internationally comparable OECD methodology for Germany based on 1995 graduates was 28% (OECD, 2000: 189).

[107] According to the *Wissenschaftsrat* (1998: 13), in most degree programmes at universities, an accumulated 80% of graduates emerged after seven years, at *Fachhochschulen*, after 5.5 years. According to the *Wissenschaftsrat* (2002a: 226), the average time to degree at *Fachhochschulen* in 1999 was 4.8 years, nearly a year above the scheduled length.

Business Administration, or Education with broad, albeit subject-centred, clearly structured curricula. Magister programmes allowed students to combine two or three subjects, for the most part leaving time-planning and the creation of curricular coherence up to them. In the *Diplom* programmes, it was the excessive workload rather than a lack of structure that led to high drop-out rates and long duration (see also G. Turner, 2000: 121 ff.). The great diversity of entrance qualifications, a lack of guidance, overcrowding, poorly coordinated time tables, and mismatches between course contents and exams aggravated the problem (Frackmann & de Weert, 1993; KMK, 1996; KMK & HRK, 1993; G. Turner, 2000: 111 pp.). In addition, federal legal provision on funding mechanisms prescribed dysfunctional teacher-student ratios in many subject areas and impeded universities from rectifying the situation (see next section on 'access'). Furthermore, the lack of a formal status for part-time students inflated the statistics, since a large number worked to fund their studies (Wissenschaftsrat, 1998:13 ff.).

6.2.5 Access

Regulations on admissions to HE in Germany differed by institutional type. With only a few exceptions, in 1998 HEIs were not allowed to take entrance exams or select their students according their own criteria. Rather, graduation from secondary school conveyed entrance qualifications. The *Abitur* (also known as *Allgemeine Hochschulreife*, literally 'general maturity for HE') from a *Gymnasium* (a secondary school streaming the best 30-40% of pupils as of lower secondary education) after 12 or 13 years of schooling entitled students to take up any degree programme at any HEI, subject only to capacity limits. The only exceptions were architecture, fine arts, and music, where applicants had to undergo entrance exams. Below the *Abitur* ranged the *Fachgebundene Hochschulreife* ('subject-specific maturity for HE'), awarded by a *Fachgymnasium* (subject-specific *Gymnasium*) after 12 years of schooling. It entitled one to join any *Fachhochschul* programme and a limited set of university programmes in certain subject areas. Finally, the *Fachhochschulreife* ('maturity for FH') entitled students to enter any *Fachhochschul* programme and could be obtained from a *Berufsschule* (vocational school) after 12 years of schooling. In addition, each of the *Länder* had their own specific entry possibilities for applicants with vocational qualifications and professional experience (see for example Jonen, 1995).

Derived from the constitutional right to freely choose a profession (§12 GG), *Abitur* holders were entitled to freely select the subject and place of study. When demand outgrew programme capacities in the 1970s in subjects such as medicine and psychology, the constitutional court ruled that a complicated national system for the calculation and assignment of programme capacities (*Studienplätze*) had to be put in place (numerus clausus judgement, BVG 1972). Class numbers offered

had to be calculated according to norms laid down in the *Kapazitätsverordnung* (capacity regulation, KapVo) and so-called 'curricular norm values' (*Curricularnormwerte*, CNW), leading to a high degree of homogenisation of teacher-student ratios in the fields it controlled. Applications were handled and assigned by a central agency (*Zentralstelle zur Vergabe von Studienplätzen*, ZVS) based on GPA, waiting time, and social criteria[108] (Frackmann & de Weert, 1993: 70 ff.)

In 1998, the entry rate to HE in Germany was 30.4%[109]; about 70% to universities and about 30% to *Fachhochschulen* (Wissenschaftsrat, 2002a:217-218; 2004a:106). The comparatively low percentage of students entering HE[110] was subject to repeated criticism. Others attributed it to the fact that Germany had a comparatively well-developed vocational training system (*Duales System*) encompassing fields which, in other OECD countries were covered by the HE sector. For nursing, pre-school education, parts of social work, and most trades and technical vocations, this system offered three-year dual programmes combining schooling and training at corporations (see for example Ulrich & Krekel, 2001).

Even prior to 1998, many features of HE access had been criticised (see for example H. J. Meyer & Müller-Böling, 1996; G. Turner, 2000): first, with a greater percentage of an age group obtaining the study credential (36.7% in 1997/98 according to *Wissenschaftsrat* (2004a: 105), the concept of 'general maturity' increasingly clashed with reality as the high rates of students changing subjects or dropping out completely showed. Second, as HEIs were not allowed to select students based on their criteria, student abilities/interests and programmes matched poorly. Third, limited capacities of the FH sector drove up their entry criteria so that the required GPA sometimes exceeded that of universities in the respective field, and half of *Fachhochschul* entrants were in fact *Abitur* holders.[111]

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[108] One of the most important 'social criteria' was the geographic proximity of the university to the applicant's parents' home, a criterion at odds with mobility and differentiation among universities.

[109] These numbers are based on the average of 19-25 year olds of the population in the respective year, see *Wissenschaftsrat* (2004a: 106). The numbers is broadly in line with the OECD number of 28% (OECD, 2000: 173) used in the comparative analysis, referring to net entry rates into tertiary education type A, encompassing mainly universities and *Fachhochschulen*.

"The net entry rate of a specific age is obtained by dividing the number of first-time entrants to each type of tertiary education of that age by the total population in the corresponding age group (multiplied by 100). The sum of net entry rates is calculated by adding the net entry rates for each single year of age. The result represents the proportion of people of a synthetic age-cohort who enter the tertiary level of education, irrespective of changes in the population sizes and of differences between countries in the typical entry age" (OECD, 2001:153).

[110] The OECD country mean was 40% in 1998 (OECD, 2000).

[111] 49.9% in 1997 and 53% in 1999 according to numbers of the Federal Statistical Office (Wissenschaftsrat, 2002a:217)

Fourth, even though vocational training partly accounted for low HE participation rates, it was widely agreed that in the medium run, HE participation would have to increase rather than decrease.

6.2.6 Transition to employment

HE degrees in Germany were always legally defined as "qualifying for a profession" (*berufsqualifizierend*) by the HE Framework Act (§10 HRG), even though the degree to which they achieved this goal varied in practice. Yet, a high degree of job preparedness was traditionally expected from graduates. In some professions such as architecture, engineering, and psychology, professional recognition was tied to the *Diplom* degree. This also implied that in subjects such as engineering and architecture, the *Diplom* degree directly conveyed the right to practice. In contrast, the *Magister* degree never really became well established in the job market (see for example Wissenschaftsrat, 1999:23-24), partly due to the fields covered (humanities and social sciences) and the long average duration of studies. Nevertheless, even the *Magister* degree was legally defined as "qualifying for a profession". Particularly in the humanities, the need to shorten courses and increase the employability of graduates had been a widely-shared concern for quite a long time. In the *Staatsexamen* programmes, long supervised internships—in teaching, legal, pharmaceutical, and medical training—were part of the education, and the second exam after that directly qualified for entry to the profession.

Hiring policies for the public service both reflected and perpetuated the hierarchy between universities and *Fachhochschulen* in that university degrees qualified for the higher ranks (*höherer Dienst*) while FH degrees qualified only for the middle ranks of public service (*gehobener Dienst*), which meant that the pay scale for university graduates began where that for FH graduates ended. In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of unemployed graduates from HE had risen, even while the percentage of about 4% was still clearly below those for other groups (Wissenschaftsrat, 1999: 31). Prior to 1998, employers had started to call for a curricular reform that would improve the international and vocational experience of graduates, internationalise and de-specialise the curricula, pay closer attention to key skills, and decrease the de facto length of studies (BDI et al., 1997) .

6.2.7 Funding

For many years prior to 1998, the German HE reform debate had been overshadowed by the severe under-funding of the sector (1.0% of GDP was spent on all tertiary education in 1998 by private and public sources, which was below the OECD mean of 1.3% (OECD, 2001:82)). The KMK (1996: 8) had noted that

> the increasingly acute under-funding of HEIs, which will—according to all indicators (…)—increase further in the coming years, does not allow for the realisation of important projects in all areas of structural reform of HE or at least renders it very difficult. Moreover, the scarcity of funds makes that the reform efforts are frequently misunderstood as cost saving measures, which paralyses the reform will of many stakeholders.

Funding of HEIs was entirely the responsibility of the Länder, with the exception of buildings and large investments which were co-financed by the Federal level, and some project funding from the Federal Ministry. A significant part of research funding also came from the Federation and was channelled through a national research council (*Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft*, DFG). The funding method varied between the *Länder*, rendering it difficult to make overall statements. In most *Länder*, the biggest funding block—personnel—was directly paid for by the *Länder* ministries. Formula- or contract-based funding only applied to a small part of the overall budget.[112] Resource planning for degree programmes was based on the KapVo and CNW which prescribed the numbers of students an institution had to admit based on the number of academic staff (see section 6.2.5. on 'access'). Consequently, the link between student numbers and direct budget allocations to HEIs tended to be weak, and worked through the regulated personnel structure instead. This system perpetuated under-funding in subjects with low teacher-student ratios, as CNW had not been adjusted since the late 1970s (see also Hoffacker, 2000:161).[113]

Although the introduction of tuition had been heavily debated for many years, in 1998 no student fees were levied in the German HE system (see also Ziegele, 2001c). According to the Federal Education and Training Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*, BAföG), students whose parents' income was below a certain minimum threshold were entitled to grants and loans, the exact amount of which varied according to circumstance. The maximum amount of both in combination came close to covering the full cost of living (slightly above €500 per month at the time). 18% of students were BAföG recipients (Johnstone, 2005).

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[112] Even in 2003, major parts of the public funding for HE budgets were formula-based in only three of the 16 *Länder* (Orr, 2004: 6). In Brandenburg, Hesse, and Rhineland-Palatinate, 95% of the state subsidies to HEIs in Germany were distributed according to the formula. In Baden-Wurttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, North-Rhine Westphalia, and Thuringia, 79% or more of the state subsidies were distributed on a discretionary, incremental basis.

[113] For an encompassing presentation of HE funding in Germany, see Ziegele, 2001b; Ziegele & Federkeil, 2001.

6.3   Policy formulation

Given the federal nature of the German HE system, actors at Federal and *Länder* levels jointly shaped the policy formulation process on the transition to two-cycle degrees in Germany, from the very beginning referred to as 'Bachelor' and 'Master' (not Masters) programmes.[114] I continue to use the more common term 'Masters' programmes, unless a specific degree title is referred to. This chapter concentrates on important events in national policy formulation and disentangles the contribution of national-level actors and *Länder*, as far as they contributed to national policy formulation. It does not trace policy formulation in individual *Länder*.

At the Federal level, the two most decisive legal changes were affected through the Fourth and Sixth Amendment of the Federal Framework Act for HE (referred to as Framework Act or HRG). The Fourth Amendment in 1998 permitted the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes alongside the traditional degrees on a trial basis. The Sixth Amendment in 2002 rendered the new programmes part of HEIs' regular provision, albeit still in parallel to the traditional degrees. Among the *Länder*, national policies on Bachelor and Masters programmes were coordinated in the KMK through a series of statements and decisions, notably the so-called 'structural guidelines' formulated in 1999 and amended in 2001 and 2003. While the KMK decisions were not legally binding, they fulfilled an important function as 'soft law',[115] and documented consensus among the *Länder* on a range of features of the new degree programmes within the federal framework.

6.3.1   Early beginnings: preparing the Fourth HRG Amendment

The Fourth Amendment of the Federal HE Framework Act (HRG) in August 1998 (HRG, 1998: Art. 19) was the key to open up German HE to Bachelor and Masters degrees: it allowed HEIs to introduce them on a trial basis. The Amendment was part of a larger reform package which—in the words of the Federal Ministry— was meant to prepare "institutions of higher education for the new demands based on globalization, internationalization and competition, (…) to strengthen their autonomy and give them more room for their profiling" (BMBF, 2005).

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[114] …except for a few advocates of the Latin terminology: *Bakkalaureus* and *Magister (Artium/Scientium)*, which were also featured in the early legal provision in the early phase but remained widely unused and were soon abandoned.

[115] Formulations such as 'the KMK ruled that…' or 'according to KMK regulations…' do not imply that I refer to legal regulations in the strict sense.

The Amendment of the HRG had been under preparation by senior civil servants at the BMBF for many years,[116] but it was only in 1998 that the time had come for a major reform of German HE governance. Since 1994, former lawyer and member of the federal parliament Jürgen Rüttgers had been Minister for Higher Education, Research and Technology under the conservative/liberal coalition government led by Helmut Kohl. Various signals from the HE sector, employers, and even from the social-democrat/green opposition—which held the majority in the Federal Council (*Bundesrat)* at the time—showed that public opinion favoured a substantial increase of HEI autonomy, a more competitive character of the HE system, and the possibility to introduce Bachelor and Masters programmes in particular.

As early as 1994, the Foreign Office had voiced concerns about the international competitiveness of German HE to the KMK (KMK, 1994). A considerable number of Bachelor and Masters programmes had already been established based on special authorisation of *Länder* governments. In 1996, the BMBF contributed to the pressure through an increase of precedence by funding the programme "internationally-oriented degree programmes" (*Auslandsorientierte Studiengänge*, AOS) carried out jointly by DAAD and HRK and taken up with great enthusiasm by German HEIs (DAAD & HRK, 2001).[117] A similar DAAD programme (*Master plus*), launched in 1997, was funded by the Foreign Office.[118] The KMK (1997: 1) had pleaded to strengthen the international competitiveness of German HE and to "open the German degree system for the introduction of Bachelor or *Bakkalaureus* and Masters or *Magister* degrees", and the HRK (1997) had developed parameters for the design of the new degree programmes. Employer demands for reforms of curricula of degree structures had become more pronounced (BDI et al., 1992; BDI et al., 1997) and explicitly encouraged the HRG Amendment (BDA, 1998a, 1998b).

In spite of this far-reaching political consensus, consultations between the Federation and the *Länder* to carve out the Amendment's wording turned out to

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[116] In this regard the influence of Hans Rainer Friedrich, the long-standing head of the HE Directorate at the Ministry, deserves some mention.

[117] See www.daad.de/hochschule/de/5.2.1.1.html, retrieved 22 July 2004, as well as DAAD (2000: 13) and DAAD & HRK (2001). The programme ran from 1997 to 2003 with a budget of DM65 (€33.2) Mio. The programme was aimed at increasing the attractiveness of German degree programmes for foreign students. It supported Bachelor and Master programmes where about half of the students had to be foreigners, the majority of the programme had to be taught in English, and a stay abroad had to be part of the programme. In six selection rounds, 62 programmes were selected from a total of 452 applicants (plus another 21 programmes which received partial funding).The tender was opened on 15 December 1996. In spite of an extremely short deadline (15 January 1997) and demanding conditions, about 200 proposals were handed in (Interview DAAD, 2004).

[118] See www.daad.de/hochschule/de/5.2.7.1.html, retrieved 22 July 2004. The initiative supported degree programmes specifically targeted at foreign holders of a first degree, especially Master programmes, which were supposed to convey the entry qualifications for a German PhD programme. In three selection rounds, 26 programmes were selected from 129 applications.

be a lot of work. As explained above, the degree to which the Federation was allowed to impose legal changes on the *Länder* was subject to continuous dispute. Whether an Amendment of the HRG needed *Länder* approval in the Federal Council depended on its respective content. The BMBF at the time preferred to seek consensus with the *Länder*. Ironically, the *Länder* governed by the social-democrat/green opposition (*A-Länder*) were more supportive of the reform package—and the introduction of the new degrees in particular—than some of the *Länder* governed by a conservative/liberal coalition (*B-Länder*). Nevertheless, the Federal Ministry fell out with the *A-Länder* towards the end of the negotiations over the question of tuition fees; the *A-Länder* wanted a ban on fees to be part of the Amendment. The Fourth HRG Amendment therefore passed the Federal Assembly (*Bundestag,* also referred to as 'Parliament') against the majority in the Federal Council, and the *A-Länder* threatened to bring the issue before the constitutional court.

However, shortly after the Amendment had been passed in August 1998, on 27 September the conservative/liberal coalition government lost the federal elections to the social democrat/green coalition. In their new government role, the coalition stepped back from court action against a law they fully supported with the exception of the missing ban on tuition fees. Edelgard Bulmahn succeeded Rüttgers as the new Federal Minister for Education and Research. Bulmahn, who had studied history and politics and worked as a teacher before rising through the ranks of the social democrats as member of parliament, had recently been member of the party executive committee and head of the social democrats' *Länder* organisation in Chancellor Schröder's home state. The social democrat/green coalition would continue to shape Federal HE policy until 2005. Besides major reforms of academic pay (*Professorenbesoldung*), staff categories, carrier paths in the post-doc phase,[119] and the ban on student fees in 2002, the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes was the major theme in national HE policy between 1998 and 2004. Over the period studied however, it was not always followed up by the Federal Ministry with the same attention.

While the Amendment was passed shortly after the Sorbonne declaration (1998), it was not influenced by this European agreement. When Claude Allègre, the French education minister at the time, contacted his German colleague Rüttgers in early 1998 to propose the joint declaration on the occasion of the anniversary of the Sorbonne, the text of the Amendment was nearly finalised. However, the French initiative raised awareness in the Federal Ministry that other European HE systems were facing similar challenges and strengthened the conviction that the chosen course was right (Interview Friedrich, 2004).

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[119] …notably, the introduction of a new staff category for post-docs (*Juniorprofessor*, similar to assistant professor) in conjunction with the abolition of the traditional *Habilitation* (see footnote 86) and regulation on time limits for the post-doc phase.

Anticipating these developments, the DAAD and HRK in May 1998 started a series of subject group-specific seminars to discuss the implications of the transition to Bachelor and Masters programmes in engineering, the humanities, and the social and the natural sciences (DAAD & HRK, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). These seminars and the accompanying documentation were an important means of carrying the discussion on Bachelor and Masters programmes into HEIs.

The Fourth Amendment HRG brought a range of major changes to various aspects of governance, teaching, research, degrees, curricula, and the employment of professors and lecturers, amending 58 of the 83 paragraphs. Section 6.3.2 focuses on the implications for degree structures and curricula, and section 0 traces the establishment of an accreditation system.

6.3.2 A headstart: the Fourth HRG Amendment in 1998

In the newly formulated Art. 19, the Framework Act made a few crucial stipulations that had a lasting effect on the design of tiered degree structures (HRG, 1998):

(1) the new degrees were introduced *alongside* the traditional degree system instead of replacing it; at that time still on a trial basis (Art. 19.1);

(2) possible degree titles were limited to "Bachelor" or "*Bakkalaureus*" and "Master" or "*Magister*" (Art. 19.1);

(3) the length of the first degree was set to a minimum of three and a maximum of four years, with its character defined as 'qualifying for a profession'[120] (*berufsqualifizierend*) (Art. 19.2);

(4) the length of the second degree had to be between one or two years, and it was defined as a *further* degree 'qualifying for a profession' (Art. 19.3);

(5) the total combined length of studies was limited to five years if both degrees were offered in conjunction (*konsekutiv*, henceforth referred to as 'consecutive') (Art. 19.4).

Each regulation implied important decisions that significantly shaped the path of the ensuing policy formulation process. First, the HRG Amendment set the course for a cautious, experimental, and open-ended approach to the introduction of the new degrees. This meant that traditional and new degree structures were maintained in parallel for the years to come. Furthermore, the introduction "on a trial basis" implied that the new degrees could be abolished again should they

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[120] The connotation of the original German term '*Beruf*' is slightly different from the English translation 'profession' in that it encompasses more than a number of clearly circumscribed 'professions' such as lawyers, medical doctors, and engineers. Accordingly, degrees in business administration or philosophy could equally be defined as 'qualifying for a profession'.

fail. It was however, left completely open when, by whom, and according to which criteria such a decision would be taken. There was no allusion to the possibility of a mandatory and legally regulated conversion at a later stage; instead the doors were opened for unregulated competition between traditional and new degrees. Second, the regulation that the new degree titles had to be "Bachelor" and "Master" expressed 'Anglo-Saxon' preferences, even if a Latin alternative was offered that would remain widely unused. Third, the regulations on the duration of studies opened the doors for a wide range of possible degree structures within a limit of five years: 4+1, 3+2 and 3½ +1½, 3+1, 3+1½, and 3½ +1. Also, the total length of five years up to the Masters level implied an increase in the nominal length of studies compared to most traditional *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes. Fourth, it was made clear from the beginning that the Bachelor degree was intended as a 'real' degree conveying a proper professional qualification—whether it was granted by a university or a *Fachhochschule*. Fifth, the definition of the Masters degree as a *further* (i.e., second) degree ruled out the 're-labelling' of existing *Diplom* or *Magister* programmes. The last important implication of these regulations results from an omission rather than an explicit statement: there was no longer a difference between *Fachhochschulen* and universities with respect to the Bachelor and Masters degrees they could grant, their titles, or length.

These changes implied far-reaching deviations from the status quo. What is remarkable is that they were largely undisputed among actors in national HE policy at the time—as statements of the HRK (1997), KMK (1997), the *Wissenschaftsrat* (2000b), and my own interviews reveal.

The cautious approach did take into account possible resistance from the *Länder* and HEIs against a more forceful approach, and was based on the consideration that it was "probably not sensible to reissue the lengthy, but fruitless debate that has been led in the 70s under the heading 'short degrees' on the imposition of a new model at one fell swoop" [own translation] (BMBF, 1997). There is however, no official evidence that the Federal Ministry would have preferred a conversion to a tiered degree structure in a single step, had it been politically feasible at the time. To the reformers, to even open up a window for reform at all was important; to the sceptics, the trial character of the new degrees was reassuring. The idea to let the traditional and the new degrees compete and leave the decision up to the 'market' was popular with both parties (Interview Friedrich, 2004). Overall, the chosen approach seems to be more a reflection of dominant perceptions at the time—it would have been unthinkable for most actors in HE policy to convert to the new system in a single step—than a negotiated compromise between reformers and sceptics.

The choice of the degree titles 'Bachelor' and 'Master' was not disputed among HE actors, and reflects that the new degrees were introduced to compete with the

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'Anglo-Saxon' world, particularly the United States and Australia.[121] The Latin alternatives '*Bakkalaureus'* and '*Magister*' were proposed by Hans Joachim Meyer, then education minister of Saxony who made the inclusion of this option a condition for the agreement of Saxony to the Amendment. The tenacity of this demand reflects the cultural dispute between the alleged 'submission to an Anglo-Saxon model' and the desire to uphold a German model built on humanist and classical traditions. Nevertheless, reality soon rendered the dispute irrelevant: HEIs rarely made use of the Latin degree titles[122] and they were silently omitted in the third version of the KMK structural guidelines in 2003.[123]

The definition of the Bachelor degree as 'qualifying for a profession' has to be understood against the background this definition applied to all previous degrees. Moreover, since the *Wissenschaftsrat*'s recommendations on short degrees and the reform of degree structures in 1966 (*Wissenschaftsrat*, 1966), it was widely acknowledged to "differentiate the programme offer of universities into an academic first degree 'qualifying for a profession', into deepening studies, especially for those pursuing an academic career, and into academic continuing education programmes" (KMK, 1993: 7). The wording of the HRG underlined the widely shared intention that the Bachelor degree should be a degree in its own right. It was not simply to become an extended *Vordiplom*, the preliminary degree granted upon successful completion of the first two years of the traditional *Diplom* programmes. It was therefore politically intended to send a strong signal to the HEIs that they were expected to make real efforts to develop curricula that delivered on the promise to qualify for the labour market within three to four years.[124]

So why was there so little dispute on Art. 19 prior to the Amendment? Part of the reason is that a conversion to the new degree structure was not anticipated at that point in time and therefore features of the new degrees were determined without considering the effects of their large-scale implementation. This holds particularly true for the funding implications of an increase in the *de jure* length of studies up to the Masters level. One possible reason is that the average time taken

[121] Because the HRG Amendment was formulated before the Bologna declaration, the fact that the term "Bachelor" was not mentioned in the Bologna declaration escapes the knowledge of most Germans even today; tiered degree structures are largely equated with 'the Bachelor-Master system' and the latter with 'the Anglo-Saxon system'.

[122] On 09 March 2005, according to the HRK data base *Hochschulkompass*, only 32 second-cycle degrees carried the 'Magister' title, most of them were in Saxony.

[123] What might have contributed to this outcome is the possible confusion between the traditional long first-cycle *Magister* degrees and the new Master-type *Magister* degrees in conjunction with the image problem of the traditional *Magister* degrees: they stood for many attributes which the new degrees intended to overcome, such as unstructured curricula, excessive length, and lack of labour market relevance (see section 6.2.4 on 'curricula').

[124] As the shortest traditional degree so far had been the *Diplom (FH)* with a common length of four years, designing such programmes constituted – and still constitutes—a challenge, particularly for universities.

to graduate from the traditional *Diplom*, *Magister*, and *Staatsexamen* programmes tended to substantially exceed their prescribed length. The hope at that point in time was that the five-year limit might reduce the *de facto* time to complete most traditional programmes, although it actually implied an increase in *de jure* length for most of them. Similarly, the length of the Bachelor degree was not thoroughly discussed because it was not expected that the majority of students would one day leave HEIs after graduation from an undergraduate programme.

Another aspect that received little attention was the question in what sense a university Bachelor degree in engineering, architecture, pharmacy, or law was actually 'qualifying for a profession' when entry to these professions traditionally required more profound studies. A broad national discussion on these implications of the 1998 regulations did not begin until around 2002.

To conclude, the decoupling of the fundamental decisions on the design of the new degrees from the question of conversion facilitated consistent policy formulation, so that the framework for the new degree structure was clearly set by the amended Framework Act. But this also led to a range of unintended consequences and raised the stakes for a conversion decision at a later stage.

Besides regulations on degree structure in its Art. 19, the 1998 Amendment of the Framework Act also introduced some changes regarding curricula. For example, Art. 15 HRG introduced the possibility of continuous assessment that complemented the traditional final exams-based system, and decreed that "a credit point system" (*Leistungspunktesystem*) should be created.[125]

6.3.3   Concomitant change: constitution of an accreditation system

The Fourth Amendment of the Framework Act also brought about a decisive change in curricular governance: the system of RPOs homogenising subject-specific curricula among HEIs throughout the country (see section 6.2.3 on 'curricular governance') was abolished (Art. 9).[126] The creation of an accreditation system to replace the former RPOs was left entirely up to the *Länder*, who did so a few months later in a KMK decision in December 1998 (KMK, 1998).[127]

Again, there was a high degree of consensus between BMBF, KMK, and HRK to establish such a system. In November 1997, the HRK had already recommended that the new degrees be subject to accreditation (HRK, 1997); in July 1998 it had outlined the main features of a possible accreditation system

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[125]   Interestingly, it made no mention of ECTS, although this was quite clearly becoming the standard European credit model, and its implementation had already been recommended by the KMK (1997).

[126]   … by deleting the phrase on which it rested.

[127]   Interestingly, the accreditation system was mentioned in the official explanation of the Amendment (Deutscher Bundestag, 1997: 19), but was deleted from the Act itself during the negotiations upon demand of some *Länder* .

(HRK, 1998a). Most of the HRK proposals were reflected in the KMK decision. In tune with the experimental nature of the new degrees according to Art. 19 HRG, the system was initially set up for a trial period of three years. Although the accreditation system underwent revisions in following years, a few central and persistent features were determined early on, such as:

(1) the nexus between Bachelor and Masters programmes and accreditation;

(2) the combination of a central accreditation council (*Akkreditierungsrat* (AR), see section 6.1 on 'actors and their capabilities') and several decentralised accreditation agencies accredited and supervised by that council;

(3) the small size of the AR secretariat and its affiliation to the KMK;

(4) the corporatist set-up of the AR, with representatives from academia, employers, students, institutional management, and the *Länder*;

(5) the concentration on periodic programme accreditation;

(6) the coexistence of state authorisation and accreditation, with the state responsible for macro planning, the funding base, and accordance with the KMK structural guidelines (the latter was later delegated to accreditation) and accreditation for subject-specific minimum standards and the professional relevance of the degrees;

(7) the rule that HEIs were to pay for their accreditation themselves.

Again, most of these features were not subject to significant debate between the major actors in German HE policy at the time. Notably, accreditation was introduced as a natural corollary of the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes (feature 1). It was clear from the beginning that all these programmes should be subject to accreditation (HRK, 1997), while the existing RPOs were supposed to continue to apply to existing *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes. There were several reasons for this nexus. Given that the traditional degrees had been regulated and standardised by the RPOs, the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes was an avenue for curricular diversity and innovation, and accreditation seemed to be the quality assurance tool that would serve the new paradigm of "increased differentiation", "competition" and "profile building" (HRK, 1998a: 1). As expressed by the former President of the HRK (until 1997) and current President of the *Akkreditierungsrat* (since 2003):

> At the time, there was the intention, regarding the RPOs, to provide a more flexible framework and to open up the possibility for HEIs to react more swiftly to developments in the labour market and science. And the accreditation system was of course much better suited for this purpose (Interview Erichsen, 2004, own translation).

Similarly, a department head at the North-Rhine Westphalian Ministry of HE expressed:

> The RPOs implied a very bureaucratic process that did not provide any innovative impulses. I used to compare it with the party of institutionalised revolution in Mexico. It happens all the time, but has no effect and does not fulfil any of the original intentions. It was a pure formality, lawyers were sitting together introducing never-ending amendments to some paragraphs and subparagraphs (Interview Fangmann, 2004, own translation).

This perception prepared the ground for coupling a change in curricular governance and the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes. These were associated with curricular innovation and diversity, and their experimental nature seemed to allow trying new curricular governance that reflected reduced state influence and strong elements of decentralisation and competition. 'Accreditation' (*Akkreditierung*) was the catchword that captured all these connotations.

Accreditation was seen as an international gold standard—the HRK cited the United States, Hungary, and the French *grandes écoles* sector as examples—and the feeling prevailed that a similar system was needed in Germany to compete internationally (ibid: 2). In the words of the KMK, accreditation was supposed to account for "the necessary differentiation in the HE sector and the increased quality demands due to intensifying international competition" (KMK, 1998: 2). But there was also a strategic element to it:

> If one would have applied the accreditation system to the classical *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes, one would have met much stronger inertia than in those cases where one wanted to innovate anyway (Interview Erichsen, 2004, own translation).

That the accreditation system should combine a central supervisory body with decentralised accreditation (feature 2) also remained undisputed among the actors; only the DHV questioned the need for a central body and wanted control over accreditation in the hands of those evaluated (DHV, 1999). Originally, the HRK had conceived the central body as a national commission assisted by a number of peer review teams rather than individual agencies (HRK, 1997: 4). The way the system was ultimately constituted by the KMK did not look too different from that at first sight, except that the central body was called 'council' rather than 'commission' and the peer review teams were replaced by proper agencies. In reality however, competitive forces between the agencies soon prevailed. The tension between the idea of common standards and competition of agencies for assignments was inherent in this construction of the accreditation system, and can be perceived today.

Both HRK and KMK agreed that the secretariat of the AR should be very small (feature 3). The HRK proposal of three staff and an annual budget of about €230,000 (ibid: 5) was actually realised by the KMK (1998: 5). Two factors contributed to this outcome: a strong concern of the HRK to avoid further

bureaucracy, and the unwillingness of the KMK to spend a substantial amount of money on the new system (Interview Erichsen, 2004; Interview Landfried, 2004). In fact, the *Stifterverband* helped break the ice by contributing a grant for three years of initial funding (KMK, 1998).

The conflicts of interest regarding the composition of the council (feature 4) were minor—the HRK demanded two more representatives of academia than ultimately realised by the KMK—and the corporatist principles of stakeholder representation and shared power between the state and different interest groups remained unquestioned.

The decision for programme-by-programme—rather than institutional—accreditation (feature 5) also proceeded without discussion. A direct consequence of the trial-based introduction of individual programmes, this approach would later cause substantial problems coping with the sheer number of accreditations to be completed.

The coexistence of state authorisation and accreditation (feature 6) was subject to criticism. The exact task distribution did change over time but it was unquestioned that the *Länder* would retain their responsibility for quality assurance as laid down in Art. 9 HRG.

Finally, there was also agreement that HEIs would have to carry the costs of accreditation (7), with an average cost of €15,000 per accredited programme. This too would later cause unforeseen problems for some HEIs.

At the time, the only real point of dispute between KMK and HRK was over attaching the AR to the KMK. The HRK had originally envisaged the AR attached to itself to stress the 'self-governance' character of accreditation. Attaching it to the *Wissenschaftsrat* was also one of the initial options. It was largely due to the funding problems that the HRK ultimately agreed with the formal attachment of the AR to the KMK; the HRK did however remain unhappy with the associated signalling effect of high-level state proximity of the German accreditation system (Interview Erichsen, 2004). The decision that the *Wissenschaftsrat* would not be involved in the new accreditation system contributed to the persistence of the programme-based approach, as institutional accreditation was the traditional domain of the *Wissenschaftsrat*. It was however, only applied to private institutions seeking public recognition (and possibly funding).

6.3.4   The *Länder* take over: KMK 'Structural Guidelines' in 1999

Already in their decision on the constitution of the accreditation system in December 1998 (KMK, 1998), the KMK announced that it would develop guidelines for all *Länder*; and formulated key questions raised by the Amendment of the Framework Act from a *Länder* perspective such as the relationship of institutional types, entrance to Masters programmes, length of degrees, and degree titles. In March 1999—a few months after the HRG Amendment—the

KMK issued their "structural guidelines for the introduction of Bachelor/Bakkalaureus and Masters/Magister degrees" [own translation](KMK, 1999) which specified the framework set by the Framework Act and served as the main national reference for the implementation of the new degrees in the following years.

In line with the introduction of the new degrees 'for trial' by the Framework Act, the KMK stated that "it will only turn out in the longer run whether the new Bachelor and Masters programmes will become established besides the traditional degree programmes or will replace them—area-wide or, as the case may be, only in individual subjects" [own translation] (ibid: 2). The KMK was completely aware that the new degrees had to be accepted in Germany if they were to find recognition abroad (ibid: 2) but did not propose a solution. To deal with the parallel systems of traditional and new degrees, a Bachelor or Masters title should not be awarded simultaneously with the traditional *Magister* and *Diplom* (ibid: §3.3). However, the latter were declared to be *equivalent* to a Masters, the *Diplom (FH)* to a "four year Bachelor honours" degree (ibid: §3.4)

As for the degree design, the KMK specified a number of issues that the Framework Act had left unregulated. Degree titles, the guidelines stated, should be independent of institutional type or variations in length, and distinguished by programme types: programmes that were "more theory-oriented" (*stärker theorieorientiert*) should be named B.A./B.Sc. and M.A./M.Sc., programmes of a "more application-oriented" (*stärker anwendungsorientiert*) type "Bachelor of..." and "Master of..." (ibid: §3.2).[128] As for the duration, the leeway granted by the Framework Act was limited to annual intervals, i.e., the 3½+1½ model was precluded (ibid: §1.2).

Moreover, both universities and *Fachhochschulen* could offer both types of programmes (ibid: §1.1). Thus the coupling of programme to institutional type—"theory orientation" to universities, "application orientation" to *Fachhochschulen*—was renounced.[129] Even more important for breaking up

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[128] Subject accretions in German language were excluded for Bachelor and Master degrees. The Latin alternatives for theory-oriented programmes, "*Bakkalaureus Artium/Scientarium*" and "*Magister Artium/Scientarium*" were ruled to lead to the same abbreviations. The Latin alternative for the application-oriented programmes were "*Bakkalaureaus der*…" and "*Magister der*…", followed by the respective subject accretion in German. Theory-oriented programmes in Economics were ruled to lead to "B.A." and "M.A.", applied programmes to "Bachelor/Master of Business Administration" ("BBA" and "MBA") (ibid).

[129] In fact, the formulations in the structural guidelines marked a transition phase. Besides the regulations listed in this paragraph, it was also stressed that although both universities and *Fachhochschulen* could now grant both Bachelor and Master degrees, this "does not put into question the different educational aims of these institutional types", and that FH degrees should remain applied in nature (ibid: 4). These statements confirmed the traditional role distribution between universities and *Fachhochschulen*. Obviously, at the time, theory-oriented programmes at *Fachhochschulen* and applied programmes at universities were envisaged as the exception rather than the rule.

traditional boxes, Masters degrees would qualify for doctoral studies, irrespective of whether they were awarded by a university or a *Fachhochschule* (ibid: §2.3). Access to the Masters level, the guidelines said, *could* be made subject to "further specific entrance requirements" in addition to a first degree, at the discretion of the *Länder* or HEIs (ibid: §2.2)

Regarding curricula, the guidelines specified that Bachelor programmes should focus on one academic core discipline with an optional additional disciplinary or interdisciplinary qualification (ibid: §1), and that both Bachelor and Masters programme should be modularised and specified in terms of credits (ibid: §4).

With the Fourth Amendment of the Framework Act in August 1998, the constitution of the *Akkreditierungsrat* in December 1998, and the KMK structural guidelines in March 1999, the initial phase of policy formulation was concluded. While most features of the new Bachelor and Masters programmes were laid down in detail in formal regulation, the fundamental question of whether to make the transition to the new degree structure had been avoided. The new regulation, therefore, only applied to those pioneering Bachelor and Masters programmes voluntarily set up by HEIs.

6.3.5 Years of pondering: from the 'Structural Guidelines' to the '10 Theses'

After this initial phase of swift policy formulation on the new degrees, a relatively long indecisive interim phase ensued in which only decisions and adjustments of minor importance were taken. While many stakeholders started to voice their views, this took place in the notable absence of a political decision in favour of a large-scale conversion from the traditional one-cycle to a two-cycle degree structure. The Sixth HRG Amendment passed in August 2002 ended the trial phase for the new degrees, but did not put an end to the parallel systems; it merely established Bachelor and Masters as regular degrees in addition to the traditional ones. An—albeit vaguely formulated—positive decision to mainstream the new degrees was only spelled out four years later under the impression of the approaching Berlin Ministerial Summit (see chapter 5 on 'Europe') by the KMK's "10 Theses" (KMK, 2003a). This chapter traces major developments over the four-year period from March 1999 to June 2003. To disentangle the cacophony of voices, I present the major contributions by actor, starting with the Federal Ministry, the KMK and their interactions including signing the Bologna and Prague declarations. I then proceed through the *Wissenschaftsrat* and *Akkreditierungsrat* to the HRK, employer associations such as

the BDA and the *Stifterverband*, the student organisation fzs, and major critics such as the AFT and DHV.[130]

The signing of the **Bologna and Prague declarations** in 1999 and 2001 (see chapter 5 on 'Europe') did not have an immediate effect upon national policy formulation in Germany, and it took some time until any references to these European events appeared in KMK or Federal documents. The Bologna declaration did however have some national significance as a "celebration of reconciliation" (Interview Müller-Solger, 2004, own translation), after Rüttgers' single-handed signing of the Sorbonne declaration had caused some irritation among the *Länder*. This time, representatives of the Federation and the *Länder* signed. The latter were represented by the Minister of Education of the *Land* Schleswig-Holstein and Delegate of the Federal Council in the European Council of Education Ministers, Ute Erdsiek-Rave, rather than by the President of the KMK—a reflection of the fact that "nobody was aware of the dynamics of the process and the significance of the declaration at the time" (Interview Erdsiek-Rave, 2004, own translation). Similarly, the Federal Ministry was too preoccupied with other tasks in the context of the German EU Presidency during the period to grasp the significance of the declaration, and Minister Bulmahn sent one of her Parliamentary State Secretaries, Wolf-Michael Catenhusen, to sign on her behalf. That Italy would host the Bologna declaration had already been decided at the Sorbonne conference; Italy, keeping a certain distance from the European Union and its present German Presidency, did not give Germany a special role in this event (Interview Müller-Solger, 2004).

Compared to the Fourth HRG Amendment in 1998 which had been key to opening up the German HE system for Bachelor and Masters degrees, the **Federal Ministry**'s further contributions to promoting the introduction of the new degrees were relatively modest. While it remained a clear promoter of the new degrees, the Federal Ministry refrained from strong public statements in favour of conversion. It also stayed away from using legal instruments for pushing Bachelor and Masters programmes, partly because it put its hope on the dynamics of voluntary implementation instead, and partly because its competencies to interfere in the process were increasingly questioned by the *Länder* (Interview Ehrenberg, 2004; Interview Müller-Solger, 2004). The only further legal measure taken in relation to the new degrees at the federal level was the Sixth Amendment of the Framework Act, which passed the Federal Assembly in August 2002 (HRG, 2002).[131] While the Amendment ended the trial period and rendered the new degrees part of the HEIs' regular provision (§19), the theoretical possibility to legally impose the conversion to the new degrees was not an issue

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[130] The overview of the political developments regarding the two-cycle structure put together by Kleinwächter (2003) helped me reconstruct the series of events presented in this section.

[131] The Fifth HRG Amendment from 16 February 2002 concentrated on the reform of academic career patterns and salary structures.

in the political debate. The envisaged evaluation was skipped altogether and the ending of the trial period passed without any serious discussion; in the explanatory statement to the draft Amendment it was merely justified with the large number of Bachelor and Masters programmes already implemented in the meantime (BMBF, 2002). One reason for this low-key approach was that political attention was captured by other aspects, such as the ban on tuition fees and the mandatory student representation in Southern Germany (*verfasste Studierendenschaften*).

The social democrat/green coalition won a second electoral term on 22 September 2002, a good month after the Sixth HRG Amendment. Bulmahn remained in office as Minister for Education and Research. In the coalition treaty, the Government set the target to increase the percentage of an age group entering HE upon completion of secondary education to 40% (SPD & Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2002: 32). It also offered the *Länder* a "pact for HEIs" to improve the conditions of studies and increase the quality of HE, which was later operationalised through financial support for the implementation of Bachelor and Masters programmes.[132] The plan was not met with univocal enthusiasm by the *Länder*. To the contrary, the Federal Ministry's offer to make a direct contribution to the costs of accreditation born by HEIs was rejected by the B-*Länder* (Interview Ehrenberg, 2004).

Given the increasing level of dispute over the right of the Federal Ministry to actively contribute to promoting the implementation of Bachelor and Masters programmes, progress in this regard depended crucially upon *Länder* policies and their agreement in the **KMK**. It took this body until the summer of 2003 to come up with the next step of policy formulation. Up to that point, the KMK's main contributions were minor refinements of the regulations enshrined in the 'structural guidelines' and the decision to render the accreditation system a permanent institution. A KMK guideline of September 2000 (KMK, 2000b) reinforced the earlier demand that Bachelor and Masters programmes should be modularised and carrying credits, and provided detailed regulation for their implementation.[133] An amendment of the 'structural guidelines' from December 2001 (KMK, 2001b) specified several aspects of the new degrees. For example, a final thesis was made obligatory for Bachelor programmes, and the Bachelor degree was defined as entitling university entrance.[134] Furthermore, the concept of "consecutive" programmes from the 1998 HRG Amendment was now

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[132] About €30 million per year over a period of six years were earmarked for this purpose, the bulk of which were additional funds (BMBF, 2003a; Interview Ehrenberg, 2004).

[133] One credit was defined to carry a workload of 30 hours and 1800 hours as the maximum annual workload. The way these guidelines were used in the debate, 1800 hours became the standard rather than the maximum.

[134] Technically it was for this purpose equated with the *Abitur*, with the exception of Bavaria which only equated the entitlements conveyed by a Bachelor degree to those conveyed by a *Diplom* degree of the institutional type at which it was obtained.

operationalised in term of programmes that "build upon each other in terms of content" and would not exceed a total of five years length up to the Masters degree. The guidelines foresaw that the Masters phase could continue and deepen the disciplinary content of the Bachelor programme or extend it to become interdisciplinary. Importantly, 'consecutive' was not defined in terms of immediate sequence, i.e., it was clarified that consecutive programmes could be studied at different HEIs and even different institutional types, and could be interrupted by phases of professional activity. Bachelor and Masters programmes in teacher education were not covered by the structural guidelines and the KMK decided in March 2002 to formally accept ongoing pilot projects in some *Länder*, subject to a number of conditions (KMK, 2002b).

A decision was pending with respect to the accreditation system the KMK had set up jointly with the HRK in early 1999 as a three-year trial. An external evaluation commissioned by KMK and HRK towards this end highlighted serious flaws,[135] but nevertheless came to an overall positive result (Bieri, Brinkman, Mayer, Osterwalder, & Schulze, 2001). On this basis, the KMK decided to maintain the approach, subject to a few adjustments (KMK, 2001a). Following another internal report (KMK, 2002a), a KMK statute put the accreditation system on a new and permanent basis in May 2002 (KMK, 2002c). The major decisions were:

(1) to phase out the system of RPOs and extend accreditation to all new degree programmes, including those leading to *Diplom* and *Magister*;

(2) to pass over to the AR the operational responsibility of the *Länder* to ensure comparability of programmes and degrees according to Art. 9 HRG;

(3) to attach the AR to the KMK office and fund it through the KMK;

(4) to increase the number of AR members to 16 and adjust the composition. Two international members were added, the weight of *Länder* and HEI representatives was increased, and the separate representation of 'academia' in addition to HEI representatives given up.[136]

The question of a proper legal basis for the AR however, remained unaddressed. While the AR was asked to seek reduction in complexity and costs of accreditation procedures, these issues too, remained by and large unsolved.

Although **cooperation between the Federal Ministry and the *Länder*** on the introduction of the new degrees was overshadowed by an ongoing dispute over

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[135] The report from September 2001 also highlighted a number of quite serious flaws, such as inadequate funding, missing legal basis, half-hearted distribution of labour between accreditation and public authorisation, weak international representation, lack of coordination between the agencies, and a tendency towards regional monopolies.

[136] The new composition included 4 representatives of the *Länder*, 4 representatives of HEIs, 2 student representatives, 2 international members and 4 representatives of the employment system, including one of the public service (again from the *Länder*).

competencies, the two did work together in several ways. An important forum for cooperation was the German National Bologna Follow-up Group, which began work in March 2000. Initially it comprised the chair of the HE Committee of the KMK, three individual *Länder* representatives, and one representative each from the Federal Ministry and the HRK, but later came to include representatives of the DAAD (since October 2002), the AR, and the fzs (since May 2004). The group fostered informal dialogue among actors on the new degrees and contributed to a slowly spreading consensus on conversion (Interview Tück, 2004).

The Federal Ministry, KMK, and HRK also cooperated to produce stocktaking reports for the Prague and the Berlin Ministerial Summits (KMK, 2000c; KMK, BMBF, & HRK, 2000; KMK, HRK, & BMBF, 2002b). These exercises contributed to the awareness among *Länder* ministries of the dynamics of the process (Interview Friedrich, 2004), and the resulting reports documented progress in implementation. By November 2000, the 1998 HRG regulations had been translated into all *Länder* HE laws, and 450 new degree programmes had been implemented or were under preparation, with a total enrolment of 6,702 students in Winter semester 1999/2000 (KMK, 2000c: 3-4). By April 2002, the numbers had grown to 911 Bachelor and Masters programmes enrolling 18,945 students in Winter semester 2000/2001 (KMK, HRK, & BMBF, 2002a). The reports constituted the first official documentation of *Länder* commitment to the Bologna process, even if the tone was still somewhat restrained.[137]

The ***Wissenschaftsrat*** (WR) contributed to the establishment of the new degree structure through a series of recommendations pointing out wider implications and necessary paradigm changes (Wissenschaftsrat, 2000a, 2000c, 2002a, 2002b). These documents became an important reference point in the debate. While the WR clearly assumed a promoting role, it refrained from an explicit statement in favour of large-scale conversion like most other actors.
Its first and key set of "recommendations on the introduction of new study structures and degrees (…) in Germany" (*Wissenschaftsrat*, 2000b) was published in January 2000.[138] Referring to its earlier recommendations on short degrees

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[137] The first report stated that "the aims of the 'Bologna declaration' are largely in tune with the aims which the Federation and the *Länder* have developed in the recent years for the modernisation of HE in Germany and the strengthening of its international attractiveness" (KMK, 2000c:1). In the second report, this statement was repeated, only that the word "largely" was removed (KMK et al., 2002a:2).

[138] Given the usual influence of WR recommendations on the political agenda, it is surprising to see that the recommendation was published more than a year *after* the Amendment of the Federal HE Framework Act. There are two reasons for this. First, the recommendations were closely connected with a "comment on the relationship between HE and the employment system" published a year earlier (*Wissenschaftsrat*, 1999). Given the way the WR works, it took two and a half years to agree on both statements. Second, the recommendations were intended "to formulate demands on a reformed study- and graduation system and to point out its developmental perspectives" (ibid: 101).

(*Wissenschaftsrat*, 1966), the WR put Bachelor and Masters programmes in a broader context, such as the need to strengthen the international competitiveness of German HE, the widening participation agenda, concern with drop-out rates, and changed qualification requirements from the labour market. It also mentioned European developments such as the Sorbonne and the Bologna declarations (ibid: 102-117). Generally speaking, the WR confirmed the course set by HRG and KMK structural guidelines, but stressed the need for curricular reform including stronger differentiation of degree programmes, a better structured and more relevant curriculum, new forms of teaching and learning, a stronger focus on transversal skills, more interdisciplinary courses, and study periods abroad.[139] Bachelor degrees should convey "basic subject-, methodological- and social competences" for employment, further study and lifelong learning (ibid: 128). "In order to avoid an increase in study length by all means", the WR subscribed to the concentration on one academic core subject[140] suggested in the KMK guidelines and encouraged the *Fachhochschulen* to seek shorter alternatives to their work-experience semesters (ibid: 119-120). The WR explicitly called for selective entry to Masters programmes; direct transition should not become the default mode (ibid: 121). It also recommended closer co-operation between universities and *Fachhochschulen* to increase permeability and supported the move from institutional differentiation to differentiation by curricular profile begun by the KMK structural guidelines. In this context, it also demanded a "signal from public employers" to end the "existing discrimination" of *Fachhochschul* graduates (ibid: 126-127).

Although the WR did not clearly come out in favour of conversion, its recommendation included the most pronounced statement at the time on the relationship between the traditional and the new systems:

> In the long run, it will hardly be possible to offer the traditional *Magister* and *Diplom* degrees besides the tiered study and degree structures. It [the WR] therefore recommends the HEIs to evaluate the new programme and degree provision after an adequate phase. In the medium term, only tiered degree programmes should be offered in all subjects where this has proven sensible. These should consistently lead to the internationally compatible degrees *Bakkalaureus*/Bachelor and *Magister*/Master (ibid: 130).

In November 2001, the WR recommended the conversion of teacher education to the Bachelor-Masters degree structure (*Wissenschaftsrat*, 2000c). The recommendation went far beyond the given consensus at the time, according to which *Staatsexamen* programmes had so far been excluded from the reform.

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[139] This section draws on earlier work of the author published in (Klemperer et al., 2002: 14).

[140] i.e., "combinations of several subjects such as foreseen in traditional *Magister* programmes should not be continued" (ibid: 119).

In January 2002, the WR published a set of recommendations on the development of *Fachhochschulen* which included important statements on the new degrees (Wissenschaftsrat, 2002a). While it advised the *Fachhochschulen* to focus on their traditional strengths,[141] it strongly criticised the distinction of degree titles by theory- versus application-orientation as pitched by the KMK at the time, for this would "suggest(s) a clarity which does not correspond to the reality of research processes" (ibid: 105). It held that

> such a far-reaching diversification is neither conducive to the comparability of degree programmes nor their international transparency, and moreover supports tendencies of separation between universities and *Fachhochschulen* on an inadequate plain (ibid: 106).

On these grounds, the WR recommended a revision of the KMK structural guidelines and a strong reduction of the number of possible degree titles. The KMK took up these points in the third version of their structural guidelines from October 2003 (see section 6.3.6 below).

In its "recommendations on the reform of state degrees" published in November 2002 (Wissenschaftsrat, 2002b), the WR extended its earlier recommendation to introduce tiered degree structures to all subjects with the exception of human medicine. In teacher training and law, the introduction of a so-called Y-model was seen as appropriate to account for the fact that an increasingly smaller percentage of graduates from *Staatsexamen* programmes found employment in the public service. The WR suggested that—building on a subject specific Bachelor—the Masters phase should be used for a differentiation between regulated and non-regulated professions (ibid: 84 und 87-92). It also recommended abolishing the first state degree and transferring the responsibility for the respective examinations to HEIs. This demand was a logical consequence of modularisation, as continuous assessment did not allow for a similar level of state control as the traditional final examinations. At the same time, the WR rejected the introduction of entry exams to the public service, as practiced in France (ibid: 93-95).

The *Akkreditierungsrat* (AR), itself a product of policy formulation, significantly contributed to shaping the new degree structure through the development of "minimum standards and criteria" for the "accreditation of accreditation agencies and the accreditation of HE programmes leading to the degrees Bachelor/*Bakkalaureus* and Master/*Magister*" (AR, 1999). Its "frame of reference for Bachelor and Master" (AR, 2001) from June 2001 served to operationalise the KMK guidelines for use by the accreditation agencies, but also

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[141] i.e., on tiered degrees "oriented towards the demands of particular professional fields, which demonstrate a clear practical orientation—for example by integrating placements—and which take into account the results of applied research" (ibid: 103).

made a number of general political judgements. The paper recapitulated that while the Bachelor and Masters degrees originally had been seen as complementary to the traditional structure, the WR had in the meantime "proposed the conversion of the entire system to the new degrees". Nevertheless the AR held that "in reality, traditional and new degrees will exist side by side at least for a lengthy interim period" (ibid: 1). It concluded that in practice, there was "no need to reinvent the academic world, but the current system can be taken as a starting point, in order to be structurally modified according to the reform aims" (ibid: 2). In a similar vein, the AR explained that the logic of the new degree structure aimed at "connecting the advantages of binary and tiered systems". The AR thus argued for continuity and moderate rather than radical change.

Based on these thoughts, the AR made several practical recommendations on the conversion of traditional degree programmes. It suggested that *Fachhochschulen* could either complement their traditional *Diplom (FH)* by a one-year Masters programme or shorten it by one-year and add a two-year Masters programme.[142] Universities, in the AR's eyes, were "faced with the task to divide the traditional programmes into two sensibly separable segments, each for itself qualifying for a profession, but relating to each other" (ibid: 2).

The KMK had commissioned the AR to make the distinction between more application-oriented and more theory-oriented Bachelor and Masters programmes workable. The AR complied, but did not hide that it deemed the distinction problematic, as "application requires theoretical foundation and theoretical foundation opens up possibilities of application" (ibid: 3). Nevertheless, it proposed the following heuristic: if a Masters programme did not directly aim at an occupational field, it should be regarded as theory-oriented; alternatively, it should be assumed to be applied. Exemptions should be granted, but require extra justification. In other words, theory-orientation of degrees was defined as the default mode and not based on specific research evaluation.

The AR developed a further classification distinguishing "genuine" Masters degrees which built on a Bachelor degree in the same discipline, from "hybrid" Masters which added a new disciplinary perspective. The latter were not supposed to qualify for access to doctoral studies. In many ways, these regulations reflected traditional paradigms: mono-disciplinary, academically-driven degree programmes were established as the norm; trans-disciplinary and applied degrees as the exception. While the classification was not taken up in the revisions of the KMK structural guidelines, it contributed to labelling trans-

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[142] The AR anticipated the problem that given the German tradition, the benchmark for the level of a first labour-market qualifying degree was set by the existing (four-year) *Diplom (FH)* and it would therefore be difficult to establish a shorter first degree. Nevertheless, it cited the possibility to design three-year Bachelor degrees by postponing some of the professionalizing elements of the *Diplom (FH)* to labour market entry (i.e., to cut out the work-experience semesters or replace them with case studies).

disciplinary Masters programmes as 'second-class' and was thus at odds with original intentions to use the introduction of the new degrees to promote the inter-disciplinary orientation of studies.

It took the German Association of Vice-Chancellors (HRK) quite a while to come out in favour of conversion to the new degrees, reflecting tensions between a supportive board and more sceptical views within the membership (Interview Landfried, 2004). In February 2001, the HRK plenary issued its first official paper on Bachelor and Masters programmes that went beyond welcoming their introduction in parallel to the traditional degrees. It stated that

> in the long run, in Germany too, a tiered system should replace the one-cycle system in all subject areas in which this seems sensible. However, for the time being, the possibility to maintain the integrated long first-cycle degrees should be retained (HRK, 2001a:4).

The HRK maintained this position until around the time of the Berlin Conference.

One of the main concerns of the HRK was the adjustment of legal provision linking career tracks in the public service to HE degrees. The HRK united vice chancellors of universities and *Fachhochschulen* and was a major promoter of equal opportunity for university and *Fachhochschul* graduates, and for more permeability and flexibility of career paths in the public service. They were met with resistance from the *Länder* ministers of interior who continued to think along traditional lines. The KMK's position was closer to that of the HRK, but it was up to the 'Standing Conference of the Ministers of Interior' (IMK) to decide on entrance criteria for public service in Germany. The issue became exemplary for the degree to which the transition to Bachelor and Masters programmes was associated with real change of paradigms and practices in the labour market as a whole, and for which the public service had an important signalling function.

In February 2000, the HRK demanded that ideally, the public service tracks be given up in favour of a more flexible performance-based system (HRK, 2000), referring to the earlier criticism of the *Wissenschaftsrat* (2000a:126-127).[143] As an interim stage, the current segmentation of opportunities should be given up, according to which only university graduates were accepted for the top track of civil service. The HRK demanded that all Masters-level graduates and particularly qualified holders of four-year Bachelor degrees and the *Diplom (FH)* should have the right to apply for higher service; holders of three-year Bachelor degrees[144] should qualify for higher intermediate service. Only two months later, the KMK passed a statement on the issue which addressed several, but not all

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[143] They also hinted at the incompatibility of the traditional German system with the EU directive on the mutual recognition of professional degrees.

[144] The same should apply to graduates from ministerial *Fachhochschulen* (*verwaltungsinterne Fachhochschulen*) and professional academies (*Berufsakademien*).

demands of the HRK (KMK, 2000a). While it clearly supported the aim that the distinction of service tracks should be abandoned in the medium term, the proposition for the short-run differed. It suggested that all Masters degrees should qualify for higher service and all Bachelor degrees for higher intermediate service. Negotiating a compromise with the IMK turned out a difficult exercise and took another two years, as they wanted to continue to differentiate between university and FH degrees on entry to the civil service. In November 2001, the HRK Plenary announced the joint resistance of KMK and HRK against these plans (HRK, 2001b). This marked the beginning of a series of protests of *Fachhochschulen* in different *Länder*, who were supported by the universities (dpa, 2001). The compromise finally reached in May 2002 (IMK/KMK, 2002) stipulated that whether a *Fachhochschul* Masters programme qualified for the top track of civil service should be decided on a programme-by-programme basis in the accreditation process. For this purpose, a representative of the respective ministry of interior should be part of the accreditation teams for programmes in question. While the agreement watered down the KMK position and the original demands of the HRK, it opened up higher public service careers for *Fachhochschul* graduates for the first time. It would soon turn out that in practice, virtually every *Fachhochschul* programme submitted for accreditation was authorised to qualify for higher public service, though this did not mean that it was easy for *Fachhochschul* graduates to enter the higher public service, which remained subject to a range of other formal and informal barriers.

Given that the Bachelor degree was defined as "qualifying for the labour market", the response of **employers** was crucial for the success of the reform, and was carefully watched by the sector and the general public. In October 1999, the employers' association BDA published a widely-noted statement, the "Cologne declaration". Welcoming Bachelor and Masters programmes and the introduction of accreditation, it also warned of the "mere adoption of the Bachelor and Masters system, particularly of the Anglo-American variant". Instead, it called for "a self-contained Bachelor/Masters [system], provided with the quality mark 'international and qualifying for a profession'" (BDA, 1999). This two-pronged positioning—supporting Bachelor and Masters programmes, but warning of mistakes and calling for original reform—would remain typical of the employers' contribution in the years to come. For example, the *Stifterverband* promoted the new degrees with a competition for exemplary Bachelor and Masters programmes, based on criteria such as clear learning goals and a corresponding organisation of the curriculum, sensible modularisation, a convincing realisation of the claim of "qualification for a profession", and entrance requirements at Masters level. Disappointed by the quality of the submissions, the *Stifterverband* highlighted the deficits of the new degrees, criticising a widespread "re-labelling" of old degrees and questioning whether the accreditation agencies had done their job properly (Winter, 2003).

Similar to employers, the **student organisation fzs** assumed a nuanced position supporting the Bologna process for the new opportunities it created for curricular reform, international co-operation and student mobility, but warning of reform mistakes (fzs, 1998). Notably, the fzs was concerned that the social and financial aspects of student mobility might be neglected (fzs, 2002a) and "international competitiveness" was pursued at the expense of improving the quality of provision from the perspective of stakeholders (fzs, 2002b). Like employers, student representatives warned of mere re-labelling of degrees, but also of using it for increasing selectivity (fzs, 1998). The fzs also called upon the Federal Ministry, the KMK, HRK, and DAAD to accept it as a participant in the implementation of the Bologna process in Germany (fzs, 2002b), pointing towards European-level student involvement as a role model (Bienefeld, 2003).

The period from 1999 to 2003 was also characterised by increasing **criticism** of the new degrees, led by the umbrella organisation of subject associations (*Allgemeiner Fakultätentag,* AFT) and the association of university academics (*Deutscher Hochschulverband,* DHV). In September 2001, the AFT accused the *Länder* of using the Bologna process and the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes as pretexts for the "reduction of academic teacher training", reflecting the separation of the integrated teacher training programmes into a predominantly subject-oriented Bachelor and a predominantly education-oriented Masters programme. They criticised the reform for being "harum-scarum" and warned "not to throw overboard indispensable quality standards in favour of cheap degree programmes" (*Billigstudiengänge*) (AFT et al., 2001), a term that frequently appeared in the public debate on the new degrees. These demands were a typical expression of the concerns of the traditional forces in academia.

In early 2003, a rumour about rejection of the new German Bachelor degrees in the UK was used by critics to make their point. Towards the end of January 2003, the DHV journal alleged that the latest recommendations of the British NARIC had classified the German Bachelor as an "ordinary Bachelor degree", which implied that it did not qualify for access into a British Masters programme (F&L, 2003). This message was widely taken up by the media under the heading "The British don't accept German Bachelor" (FR, 2003) and created a lot of confusion and frustration as it was interpreted as an indicator for real quality problems (Heimburger, 2003; Horstkotte, 2003). HRK (2003d; 2003g) and DAAD (2003) hurried to clarify the misunderstanding, and the British NARIC confirmed that German Bachelor graduates were not discriminated against (Bai-Yun, 2003; UUK, SCOP, UK-NARIC, & QAA, 2003) Nevertheless, the image of the new degree suffered lasting damage, and critics continued to refer to the incident (Himmelrath, 2001). Obviously, the German public had wrongly assumed that the Bologna process would confer the right to enter into Masters programmes in other European countries without further ado. The wide-spread perception that the new degrees had been shaped according to the 'Anglo-Saxon' model made the alleged refusal by the British even harder to digest.

In February 2003, the AFT intervened in the debate on Bachelor and Masters programmes with a fundamental criticism of the new accreditation system (AFT, 2003b). The association warned of an overall quality loss due to the lack of "comparable quality standards", indirectly criticising that the system of RPOs had been abolished. It argued that the subject associations were the only bodies who were able to develop subject-specific minimum standards and qualification requirements, and called upon their member associations to do so. On these grounds, the AFT asked the KMK and HRK to be represented in the AR. The AFT also voiced concern about the distortion of competition between accreditation agencies due to the tendency towards *Länder* monopolies. Finally, it pleaded that a possible decision on conversion to the new degrees should be taken only when it was ensured that employers would accept them.

On the first of April 2003, forces among German academics in favour of the maintenance of a clear differentiation between universities and *Fachhochschulen* surfaced in a demand from the DHV "to name the awarding HEI (…) as well as the location" in the degree title, i.e., to grant degree titles such as "Bachelor (FH Köln)" or "Master (Uni Bonn)" (DHV, 2003). Ironically enough, the demand was justified by the same argument used by those who had promoted the reform of degree titles, i.e., "higher transparency and better readability". On the same day, the HRK contradicted the DHV demand, arguing that the necessary transparency was created by the addition of the Diploma Supplement, and that the DHV proposal would increase rather than decrease transparency (HRK, 2003e).

6.3.6   Gaining momentum: Amendment of the Structural Guidelines in 2003

The third Bologna follow-up conference was to take place in Germany in September 2003. It was prepared by the National Bologna Follow-up Group, which—in addition to KMK, BMBF and HRK—since October 2002 also included representatives of the DAAD, and since May 2004, of the AR and the fzs.[145] In view of this upcoming Ministerial Summit, the debate on Bachelor and Masters programmes gained some momentum. The KMK, HRK, and a range of other actors started to make clearer commitments to the new degrees, while others started to voice their opposition more fervently. June 2003 was the first time in four years that the KMK issued a statement that went beyond incremental

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[145] Given the traditionally marginal formal role of students in German HE policy, their inclusion in the follow-up group was a big step. While students had formulated several position papers on Bachelor and Master programmes since 1998 (fzs, 1998, 2002b, 2003b), the Berlin conference was the first occasion where they were directly heard and accepted as a partner in domestic policy making. The inclusion of fzs was a reflection of the influence of the European policy formulation process, where the association of national student unions, ESIB, played an important role (Interview Tück, 2004).

adjustments and attempted a more fundamental update of their positioning towards the new degrees. These '10 Theses' were at the same time a 'trial version' of a third amendment of the 'Structural Guidelines' passed in October 2003, shortly after the Berlin Summit. I study these developments in detail, proceeding from the KMK '10 Theses' and a related HRK statement through the shifting debate in the wake of the Berlin conference to the Amendment of the Structural Guidelines.

THE KMK '10 THESES'. The KMK position paper titled the "10 Theses on the Bachelor- and Masters structure in Germany" (KMK, 2003a) reflected the progress in the political thinking on Bachelor and Masters programmes *Länder* ministers in charge of HE had made in the last four years. The progress was relatively modest, but nevertheless constituted a quantum leap when measured against the difficulty of reaching consensus among all 16 *Länder*. Five years after the Sorbonne and four years after the Bologna declaration, it was the first time that a KMK document explicitly expressed a commitment to the introduction of Bachelor and Master programmes in Germany as part of the Bologna process, as well as to the 2010 deadline. The document stated that "the tiered degree structure (…) is an important building block of the European HE Area, which—according to the Bologna agreement—shall be created until 2010". Beyond that, document did not contain any explicit commitment to conversion. To the contrary, it went on to stress that "important reasons can justify the retention of the established *Diplom* programmes beyond 2010", a sentence which paid tribute to the demands of Bavaria and the resistance of subject areas such as engineering and architecture. Nevertheless, the sentence was later commonly referred to in Germany as documenting *Länder* commitment to conversion to the Bachelor and Masters system by 2010 (KMK, BMBF et al., 2005). It remained the most explicit joint *Länder* statement in this regard until autumn 2004. The call for "clear structural guidelines and an explicit statement on the *parallel maintenance* of the traditional and the consecutive degrees [emphasis added]" in order to gain "the urgently needed acceptance of the new degree structure in academia and business", in the same document (KMK, 2003a), was indicative of the problems associated with this rather indecisive policy stance.

Regarding the design of the new degrees, the most important step forward concerned the transition from HE to employment. The Bachelor degree was defined as the "normative degree" (*Regelabschluss)* that "leads to a first labour market entry for the majority of students". Accordingly, it was now ruled that entrance to the Masters level "*must* be made subject to further special entry requirements" (KMK, 2003a: 2), replacing the earlier optional formulation. It was left to the *Länder* and HEIs to carry out this requirement.

Students immediately came out against "drastic cutback of education" and increased selectivity as a result from the regulation (fzs, 2003b). In the months to come, different academic and professional associations began to question whether the Bachelor could and should indeed become the normative degree for all fields.

Engineering and Architecture above all others began to raise strong objections. It took until autumn and winter 2004 however, and for some other professions even longer, before this latent disagreement became more explicit and surfaced in a real public debate (F&L, 2004b; KMK & HRK, 2004; KMK Sekretariat, 2004c). In addition, HEIs began to heavily criticise the plans of several *Länder* to impose "transition quotas" as a way to define the percentage of Bachelor graduates allowed to continue through to Masters level ex-ante. How to regulate transition from the Bachelor to the Masters level was another issue that continued to keep the sector busy far beyond autumn 2004.

Following the WR's line, the KMK stuck to a distinction between theory- and application-orientation only at the Masters level and abandoned the reflection of this distinction in degree titles. Accordingly, the range of possible degree titles was radically simplified and confined to B.A./M.A., B.Sc./M.Sc., B./M.Eng, and LL.B/LL.M. Another formal distinction was introduced between 'consecutive' and 'non-consecutive' Masters degrees. The former were defined as continuing, deepening or expanding a previous degree; which meant that Masters degrees in a different discipline were regarded non-consecutive.[146] On degree length, the guidelines ruled that the Masters level in the consecutive structure required a total of 300 ECTS. This effectively precluded the 3+1 model.

Responding to problems that emerged in the implementation process, the KMK re-emphasised a number of earlier regulations. For example, it explicitly ruled out the possibility of granting a Bachelor degree as part of a *Diplom* programme and to simultaneously award a *Diplom* and a Masters degree as practiced by some HEIs. The KMK also reminded HEIs that Bachelor programmes should convey the academic basics, command of methods, and professionally relevant qualifications to fulfil "qualifying for a profession". Accreditation of the new degree programmes was made obligatory, and accreditors were charged with checking consistence with the structural guidelines. In terms of career tracks in the civil service, the KMK stressed again that Bachelor degrees would convey the same entitlements as *Diplom (FH)* degrees, and consecutive Masters degrees as *Diplom* and *Magister* degrees, and that there should be no discrimination by degree length or institutional type.

HRK PLENARY STATEMENT. A month later, the HRK Plenary also came out with a position paper on Bachelor and Masters programmes (HRK, 2003f). Similar to the KMK paper, it included a cautious initial statement in favour of conversion, while simultaneously stressing the need for exemptions: "The HRK recommends to replace the *Diplom*, *Magister* and *Staatsexamen* programmes by

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[146] The possibility of experience-related Master programmes (*weiterbildend*) was explicitly mentioned, and it was stressed that their qualification level had to be equivalent to that of consecutive Master programmes. Behind that outcome was a discussion among *Länder* ministers, some who wanted to widen the spectrum of postgraduate qualification levels, about whether it was possible to reach the Master level in a non-consecutive programme.

Bachelor/Bakkalaureaus and Masters/Magister programmes." "In well-founded exceptional cases", however, the HRK Plenary stressed that "HEIs can maintain a first-cycle programme supply of four to five years duration" (HRK, 2003f: 5). The HRK agreed with the KMK's aim that Bachelor degrees should "qualify for a profession", a requirement it saw as part of the Bologna agenda. The HRK did however acknowledge the difficulties with implementing this demand, and therefore called upon "representatives of HEIs, the labour market, and the professional and subject associations to enter a dialogue on the meaning of the term" (ibid: 6). As for Masters programmes, the HRK spoke out against "quotas by state bodies" (ibid) and called for selection criteria and procedures to be put into the hands of HEIs. Regarding funding, the paper called for the state "to grant the necessary leeway in questions of capacity law" and provide the necessary additional funding for the implementation of the new degrees (ibid: 5). Regarding curricular governance, the HRK demanded the internationalisation of the accreditation system, and better efficiency and effectiveness (ibid: 7-8).

SHIFTING DEBATE. These and other contributions to the public debate showed that a gradual shift was taking place among national actors in HE policy on the open question of conversion. In a special issue of a leading HE policy journal published in July 2004, the President of the HRK stated that "a systematic structural reform of the degree offer of German HEIs has begun" (Landfried, 2003) and the General Secretary of the DAAD noted that "the Bologna process has become irreversible"(Bode, 2003). Interestingly, they did not directly call for such a reform or even welcome it, but described the development as something unavoidable. This was a general characteristic of the way the transition was politically managed in Germany; in fact hardly any actor in HE policy openly and radically came out in favour of broad-scale, more or less exception-free conversion[147] until the first *Länder* started to prepare amendments of their HE Acts to impose it.[148]

In summer 2003, the AFT and the DHV also warned of the "quality loss through large-scale introduction of new degree programmes", expressing their disagreement with the "intention to replace the internationally established *Diplom* and *Staatsexamen* degrees everywhere by Bachelor and Masters programmes, although hardly any experience was available regarding their quality" (AFT, 2003a; see also DHV & AFT, 2003). This agitated response was another indication of the spreading perception that a larger-scale conversion to the new degree structure was underway.

Different *Länder* held different positions in this debate. While the Bavarian Minister in charge of HE was in line with the DHV and the AFT, putting forward

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[147] One of the few examples for a wholehearted support of conversion were the two position papers published by the author's institutional base, the CHE, in summer 2003 (Müller-Böling & Witte, 2003; Witte & Schreiterer, 2003a).

[148] North Rhine Westphalia and Baden-Wurttemberg were the first to do so.

that it was "irresponsible to abolish the well positioned German degrees" before it was clear how the economy responded (dpa, 2003b), his counterpart in Baden-Wurttemberg argued that "we must overcome the parallelism of the new degree programmes with the old *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes" (Tagesspiegel, 2003).

THE BERLIN MINISTERIAL SUMMIT. The Berlin Summit took place on 18 and 19 September and was jointly hosted by the KMK and the BMBF. Various actors used the media attention created by the conference to advance their respective agendas, creating direct linkages between European and German policy formulation. The BMBF stressed the need to speed up the introduction of the new degrees, using a far-fetched interpretation of the commitment in the Berlin communiqué (2003) "to having started the implementation of the two cycle system by 2005" to create pressure in this direction (BMBF, 2003b; Bulmahn, 2003). It also called upon HEIs to engage in curricular reform, instead of "filling old wine into new wineskins" (see also BMBF, 2003b; Bulmahn, 2003). The HRK President criticised the severe under-funding of the HE sector which in his view, contradicted the commitments made in the Berlin communiqué and the need to improve teacher-student ratios. He also called for employers' support in making the transition to the tiered degrees (HRK, 2003c). BMBF, WR and BDA expressed their disagreement with tendencies in the KMK to impose quantitative quotas on the transition from Bachelor to Masters programmes (dpa, 2003a). Students published a harsh critique of German policy formulation on the new degrees. Under the heading "Failing Bologna", they criticised among others, the limitations of access to the Masters level, the lack of real curricular reform, the lack of nation-wide political coordination and information, the linkage of the reform to a cost-cutting agenda, and the domestic focus of the German debate (fzs, 2003a, 2003c). They did not question the introduction of tiered degrees per se, just the way it was being done in Germany.

THE THIRD AMENDMENT OF THE STRUCTURAL GUIDELINES. As indicated by the title, the "10 Theses" from June 2003 had a somewhat unclear status between position statement and soft regulation. Shortly after the Berlin conference, the KMK translated them into a third amendment of the 'Structural guidelines' (KMK, 2003c) to alleviate this ambiguity and further specify a few aspects. One was to make explicit the reach of the structural guidelines. The KMK clarified that the Structural Guidelines covered *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes in all subjects except arts and music. The latter, the *Staatsexamen* programmes (teaching, medicine, law) and divinity would—until further notice—continue with their traditional degrees.[149] Regarding curricular governance, the earlier idea to devolve the *Länder* responsibility according to Art. 9 HRG to the AR (KMK,

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[149] By autumn 2004 a draft Amendment of the 'Structural Guidelines' was nearly agreed within the KMK to include programmes in Arts and Music in the reform, but according to the 4+2 model, implying a total length of six years to the Masters level (KMK Sekretariat, 2004a).

2002a) was now operationalised by making the structural guidelines the basis of accreditation, which meant that it was the task of the accreditation agencies to check whether degree programmes complied with the guidelines. The ideas expressed in the '10 Theses' regarding degree types were developed further and the typology of Masters programmes was extended, distinguishing between "consecutive", "non-consecutive" and "experience-related" (*weiterbildende*) Masters programmes. The latter were defined as a programmes "which do not build on the preceding Bachelor's study courses in terms of their content" (KMK, 2003c: 6) (as did 'consecutive' degrees) and do not require previous work experience (as did 'experience-related' degrees). The guidelines stressed once more that all three types of degrees had to lead to the same qualification level, i.e., the disputed question of whether it was possible to reach the Masters level if the Masters programme was of a different discipline than the underlying Bachelor programme was solved by definition. Regarding curricula, the volume of the final thesis of a Bachelor and a Masters programme respectively, was prescribed (6 – 12 ECTS points for the Bachelor, 15 – 30 ECTS points for the Masters thesis). Regarding access to the Masters level, the KMK added that "the *Länder* may reserve the right to approve entry requirements" (KMK, 2003c: 4).

On the same date the 'Structural Guidelines' were passed, the KMK also took note of a report of its HE Committee that discussed the effects of the transition to the Bachelor-Masters structure on the available capacities, i.e., the number of places in Bachelor and Masters programmes that could be offered to students (KMK, 2003b). The paper sharply pointed out the trade-off and tough choices to be made between the conflicting aims to (a) increase entry rates to HE, (b) improve teacher-student ratios in undergraduate education, and (c) offer an adequate number of places at Masters level. It came to the conclusion that

> for a transition rate of 50%, the current capacities of *Diplom* programmes can just be maintained, even if the intensity of student support [i.e. teacher-student ratios] is not improved as compared to the *Diplom* programme (ibid: 9-10).

It also explained that "transition quotas of above 50% from Bachelor to Masters programmes would fundamentally question the stipulation that the Bachelor degree is to become the normative HE degree" (ibid: 9-10). These quotes demonstrate that the question of transition rates and access to the Masters level was closely tied to the capacity constraints that resulted from the tight funding situation. How to deal with this difficult question remained a point of debate and dispute between the Federal Ministry, the *Länder* and HEIs in the next few years.

Soon after their publication, the HRK strongly criticised the structural guidelines for limiting the leeway of HEIs and impeding international compatibility. Expressing regret that the KMK had passed the guidelines against the wishes of the HRK and comparing the tendency towards detailed regulations

with the former RPOs, it stressed that the "10 Theses" would have provided sufficient guidance (HRK, 2003a, 2003b). The criticism referred specifically to the detailed regulations on the length of the final thesis at both Bachelor and Masters levels, which was seen as impeding international comparability, and to the right of the *Länder* to approve admission criteria for the Masters level. Other aspects of the guidelines were commended, such as the cap on the list of possible degree titles and the establishment of a uniform qualification level for both Bachelor and Masters degrees.

6.3.7   Incremental change continued

The period after the third amendment of the 'Structural Guidelines' continued to be characterised by a rather messy process of incremental refinement of policies and gradual implementation progress.

Triggered by the attention that the Berlin Conference had received in the general media, parliamentarians of different parties finally caught an interest in the process of transition to Bachelor and Masters programmes and submitted questions. Since a Christian Democrat Government had launched the reform, it was ironic that now Christian Democrat Parliamentarians questioned the rationale for converting to Bachelor and Masters programmes, notably in Engineering, and called upon the Government to ensure the maintenance of the "well-established *Diplom* degrees (…) beyond 2010" (Deutscher Bundestag, 2003). The first national parliamentary public hearing on the Bologna process took place in May 2004. Hosted by the Parliamentary Committee for Education, Research and Technological Impact Assessment, all major actors in domestic HE policy were given the opportunity to explain their position on the two-cycle degree system and address the concerns of parliamentarians (Deutscher Bundestag, 2004). However no immediate consequences followed from this event.

The conflict between the Federal Ministry and the *Länder* ministries in charge of HE intensified. Shortly before culminating in a complete blockage of cooperation however, the BMBF, KMK, and HRK jointly declared their commitment to support the recognition of prior vocational qualifications for HE through the use of ECTS in February 2004. Thereby, they responded to a call of the Bologna declaration to improve the permeability between vocational and higher education (HRK, BMBF, & KMK, 2003). Given that such a practice was not very developed among German HEIs, the joint expression of goodwill was a first step, but did not have immediate practical consequences.

In February 2004, the ministers of the B-*Länder* refused to cooperate with the Federal Ministry on any aspect of the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes on grounds that it had no competence in this domain (dpa, 2004). In light of this situation, the BMBF made use of the HRK to channel at least some of the funding it had earmarked for the introduction of Bachelor and Masters

programmes under the 'pact for HE' to HEIs. In July 2004, the HRK opened a 'Bologna Service Point' funded by the BMBF, to support its member institutions in the implementation of the new degrees. In addition to information and support services, the Service Point was also to build up a network of Bologna coordinators employed by individual HEIs.

The DAAD also started a project to foster the practical implementation of the Bologna process at the level of HEIs. With funding from the EU and the BMBF, "ProBIG" (Promoting Bologna in Germany) envisaged supporting a number of "Bologna promoters" from different stakeholders and facilitate conferences, beginning in September 2004 (DAAD, 2005).

Shortly afterwards in November 2004, the HRK Service Point was complemented by a "Bologna Competence Centre", which was to be supported by the Federal Ministry with an amount of €4.4 Mio over a period of five years. The Competence Centre was to include targeted support to 20 HEIs who would commit themselves to implementing Bachelor and Masters programmes until winter semester 2007/08 (HRK, 2004i). However, this approach was also watched with suspicion by the B-*Länder*. The Prime Minister of the *Land* Hesse filed a constitutional court case against the Federal Ministry's support which according to him, implied interference with *Länder* authority because funding support for HEIs had been tied to the 2007/08 deadline. To the relief of the HRK (idw, 2005b), his demand was rejected by the Constitutional Court on 12 April 2005 (idw, 2005b). With the conflict escalating in this way, it was increasingly out of question for the Federal Ministry to even consider pushing the conversion to the new degree structure by means of another Amendment of the Federal HE Framework Act.

In light of this situation, progress in policy formulation could only take place at the level of the KMK and within individual *Länder*. An important step at the KMK level was the decision of the *Länder* to finally put the *Akkreditierungsrat* on a proper legal basis (KMK, 2004c). To give shape to a national framework without intervention from the Federal Ministry, it was agreed that a public foundation should be created for this purpose with different stakeholders on the foundation's board. While the KMK announced its intention in June 2004, the formal statute was only passed in December 2004 (KMK, 2004e). The KMK also responded to two pending problems with the current accreditation system; first, ongoing tensions between the AR and the agencies over the supervisory role of the AR, the autonomy of the agencies and the task distribution within the system; and second, the enormous costs of about €15,000 per programme accreditation that turned out to be a real obstacle to large-scale conversion. In response, the KMK announced that it would clarify the task distribution between the AR and agencies, and that it intended to increase the efficiency of accreditation by allowing for the bundling of several programme accreditation procedures—later referred to as 'cluster accreditation' (KMK, 2004c). Some of these issues were addressed in a KMK statement from October 2004 (KMK, 2004a), which also

brought a further fundamental innovation by opening the possibility for higher professional schools that had so far not been able to grant academic degrees (*Berufsakademien*) to submit their programmes for accreditation, provided they could ensure sufficiently academic teaching (KMK, 2004b, 2004d). This decision was strongly criticised by the HRK, which argued that this watered down the new degrees and complained that it had not been adequately consulted (HRK, 2004g).

The introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes in teacher training was particularly disputed among teacher unions, which feared that the establishment of a Bachelor level in the teaching profession would lead to a loss of status and level. In March 2004, the DHV, the AFT, and a number of teacher unions jointly warned of large-scale "losses of academic quality in connection with the area-wide introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes", particularly in teacher education. Echoing previous statements, they criticised the "hurried" introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes, "although hardly any experience is available regarding their quality" (DHV, 2004). The tiered degree structure was altogether refused as a model for teacher education. Nevertheless, policy formulation on the reform of degree structures in teacher education progressed. While full conversion was not (yet) envisaged, the KMK announced in June 2004 that it would complement the structural guidelines by a third "teacher-oriented profile" in addition to the existing research- and application-oriented ones. The KMK planned to maintain state responsibility for the content of programmes, but looked to introduce the English degree titles "Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)" and "Master of Education (M.Ed.)"—for teachers in the German education system (!) (KMK, 2004c). In autumn 2004, pilots for Bachelor and Masters programmes in teacher education were running in ten *Länder* (HRK, 2004h).

A range of issues in relation to the Bologna process evoked the discontent of the HRK with KMK decision-making and the way HEIs were involved. Besides the KMK decision to allow *Berufsakademien* to grant Bachelor degrees, this included KMK regulations on teacher education, which according to the HRK did not leave enough leeway to HEIs (Finetti, 2004; HRK, 2004e). On a more principle note, the HRK criticised the slow and ineffective coordination of policies in the KMK, poor cooperation with the Federal level and consequently insufficient representation of German interests at European level (HRK, 2004b). The HRK also criticised the *Länder* for wanting to reform the degree structure at zero cost, reminding them of the aim for better teacher-student ratios, the national aim of increasing entry rates to HE to 40% of an age cohort, and the commitments of the Lisbon process (F&L, 2004a; Marschall & Pache, 2004).

Not only between the Federal Ministry and the *Länder*, but also between the *Länder* and the HEIs, pending issues of policy formulation were delegated to courts. One such issue was the question how convincing Bachelor and Masters programmes could be designed within the confines of existing capacity law,

which dated from 1972, and the low teacher-student ratios enshrined in them for many subject areas. In July 2004, the Berlin Higher Administrative Court (*Oberverwaltungsgericht*) agreed with the argument of the Free University Berlin that it was impossible to implement a Bachelor programme in Journalism based on the existing capacity law. It entitled the university to opt for better teacher-student ratios at the expense of capacities in order to assure the quality of the programme. This decision was a first precedence for a changed approach to the trade-off between capacity and quality, and the inherited KapVo, by public authorities in Germany (HRK, 2004a).

Another open question was the permeability from the *Fachhochschul* to the university sector in practice. While the KMK had ruled that Bachelor degrees from *Fachhochschulen* conferred the same rights as those from universities, it was not at all self-evident that universities would comply. The HRK therefore undertook a survey among its members to evaluate institutional practice. The survey found substantial discrimination of universities against *Fachhochschul* graduates through their entry requirements to Masters and doctorate programmes. Based on this finding, the HRK Senate reminded its member institutions that the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes was meant to increase permeability between universities and *Fachhochschulen*, and that the admissions decision should be based on the qualifications of individual applicants rather than purely formal distinctions (HRK, 2004d). The HRK Senate also called on HEIs to speed up the introduction of ECTS not only in the context of international mobility, but also for accumulation (HRK, 2004f).

Another open question of particular relevance was whether the Bachelor degree would actually be accepted by employers and open up real career opportunities in the German labour market. To alleviate doubts, the heads of personnel of 15 leading German companies published the declaration "Bachelor welcome!", in June 2004, in which they advocated the speedy and clear conversion to the new degrees, highlighted their commitment to offering Bachelor graduates attractive employment opportunities and outlined their demands on the new degrees (Stifterverband, 2004). Soon, a great number of other companies added their signature. Nevertheless, the position of the new degrees on the labour market continued to be a main issue in public debate on the new degrees, and difficulties with labour market insertion of Bachelor graduates continued to feature in the media. In October 2004, a high-profile group of technical universities, the so-called 'TU 9', issued a statement emphasising that for university engineers, the Bachelor degree could only have the function of a mobility point, but not become the normative degree (TU 9, 2004). This stirred a series of clarification statements by KMK and HRK explaining that the new regulations did not imply that the Bachelor degree conveyed the right to practice for high-level professions in all subject areas (KMK Sekretariat, 2004c), but that it would nevertheless lead to employment for the majority of engineering graduates if university and *Fachhochschulen* were seen in conjunction (KMK & HRK, 2004).

The debate was kept alive far into 2005 by statements of professional organisations of architects, pharmacists, and lawyers which came out rather late with position papers expressing fundamental opposition to the Bachelor degree as "qualifying for a profession" in their areas (some of them more than two years after the respective KMK statements in the '10 Theses') (FAZ, 2005; VDI Nachrichten, 2005). A related, continued concern was the fear of implicit 'quotas' for access to the Masters level (BMBF, VDE, VDI, VDMA, & ZVEI, 2005; idw, 2005a). Furthermore, the accreditation system continued to be criticised by HEIs as overly bureaucratic and costly (FAZ, 2004).

6.4   Policy change until 2004

Having followed the policy formulation process over time, I now recapitulate the changes effected in degree structures and the other six dimensions in the German HE system until autumn 2004. While the new degree structure affected nearly every dimension, it should be kept in mind that with conversion largely voluntary up to that point, the majority of HEIs in Germany had not yet made the transition to the new degrees and still operated under the logic of the traditional system.

6.4.1   Institutional types

In Germany, the unification of degrees and degree titles between universities and *Fachhochschulen* was used to increase the status of *Fachhochschulen* relative to universities. In the new degree system, universities and *Fachhochschulen* could grant the same degree titles. The distinction between research and practical orientation reminiscent of the traditional profiles of universities and *Fachhochschulen,* was decoupled from institutional types, confined to the Masters level, and made irrelevant for degree titles. Institutional type, as well as de facto differences in programme profiles, could now only be inferred from the degree certificate and the Diploma Supplement.[150]

These changes were only partially reflected in entrance requirements for the public service however (see section 6.4.6 on 'transition to employment'). In this regard, the political intention of KMK and HRK that degrees offered by universities and *Fachhochschulen* convey the same entitlements was not fully realised. Given the signalling function of the public service for other employers, this continued to be an issue of debate.

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[150] In November 2004, an additional change regarding institutional types was made: *Berufsakademien* (a type of professional academy that did not count previously as part of HE) were now entitled to grant Bachelor degrees, as long as their programmes were accredited (KMK, 2004b, 2004d).

Permeability between institutional types was formally increased, as Bachelor graduates from *Fachhochschulen* could now formally continue their studies at a university. According to a recent HRK (2004d) survey, many universities have not yet conformed to this regulation.

Moreover, other aspects that defined the profiles of universities and *Fachhochschulen* such as funding, personnel requirements and academic pay, staff teaching load, and teacher-student ratios remained largely unchanged, so that different institutional realities persisted behind the common degree titles. Also, since no additional funding was made available for the introduction of the new degrees, and the traditional degree length of FH degrees was shorter than that of university degrees, it was not always easy for *Fachhochschulen* to free resources for the provision of Masters degrees in practice.

Accordingly, the implications of the unification of degree titles for the relationship between universities and *Fachhochschulen* remained subject to debate. While wide-spread consensus that the traditional status hierarchy should be overcome existed, it was disputed whether a blurring of borders between the institutional profiles was desirable. Some held that each institutional type should focus on its respective traditional strength, others envisaged the strengthening of institutional profiles independent of institutional types, and yet others feared the complete blurring of profiles. Most actors in domestic HE policy had not yet formulated an organisational view on this by autumn 2004, as opinion formation had only begun (for a state of the current debate, see Müller-Böling (2005), Witte (2005) and *Fachhochschule* Dortmund (2004)).

6.4.2 Degree structure

The parallel existence of two systems was the distinctive feature of the degree structure of German HE in autumn 2004. While the regulatory framework for new degrees was more or less fully developed, and political signals in favour of conversion were increasingly clear, the new degrees were not compulsory, and the traditional system continued to dominate institutional practice. At the national level, only a vague declaration of intent existed to move to the new structure by 2010. At the level of individual *Länder*, very different approaches to the introduction of Bachelor and Masters degrees were visible in autumn 2004 (KMK *Sekretariat*, 2004b). While most aimed for the conversion to the new degree structure by 2010, only a few *Länder* envisaged prescribing it by law. In fact, only in North Rhine Westphalia and Baden-Wurttemberg, Amendments of the respective HE Acts were underway; in Saarland the respective Act had been

passed in July 2004.[151]. Most *Länder* used a wide range of 'softer' instruments to push conversion, including contract management, decrees, and oral communication to promote the new degrees; and did so with different degrees of decisiveness Moreover, regulations for the new optional degree structure referred only to subject areas previously covered by *Diplom* and *Magister* degrees. Most *Länder* envisaged maintaining exceptions for *Staatsexamen* degrees in medicine and law,[152] as well as divinity; further exceptions for particular disciplines such as engineering, architecture, and arts and music were widespread (KMK *Sekretariat*, 2004b, 2005). Policy formulation for teacher training, fine arts and music was still ongoing.

In Winter semester 2004/2005, German HEIs offered 1,453 Bachelor and 1,481 Masters programmes, making 26% of the total provision of 11,286 German HEIs degree programmes (if Bachelor and Masters were counted separately). Considering that one *Diplom* or *Magister* programme would usually equate to a Bachelor plus a Masters programme, only 13% of the programme provision were of the new type (HRK, 2005).[153] It should also be considered that many Masters programmes had been created not by converting existing programmes but in innovative niche areas in addition to the traditional degree. These programmes often enrolled smaller numbers of students. The same held for many pioneering Bachelor programmes which did not yet attract the bulk of students. This was reflected in low student numbers enrolled in the new degrees, amounting to 8% of the total student population in Winter semester 2004/05 and 12% of new entrants in the academic year 2004, though with a strongly increasing trend. Between Winter semester 2003/04 and 2004/05 alone, student numbers in Bachelor and Masters programmes increased by 49% and 29% respectively. Yet, only 5% of all graduates obtained a Bachelor or Masters degree in 2004 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006). In spite of the low degree of actual implementation, the new degrees were very present in the political debate, and nearly all actors in German HE expected conversion to the new degree structure in most subject areas by 2010. An HRK survey from April 2004 revealed that the majority of HEIs planned

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[151] In the former two *Länder*, these amendments were scheduled to become effective from January 2005. In both *Länder*, only new Bachelor and Master programmes would be authorised as of that date. In North Rhine Westphalia, enrolments into *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes would no longer be possible beginning Winter semester 2006/07 (later changed to 2007/08); in Baden-Wurttemberg, beginning Winter semester 2009/10 (HRWG, 2004; *Zweites HRÄG*, 2005).

[152] As for law, the WR had recommended transition to the new degrees (*Wissenschaftsrat*, 2002b), but as policy formulation in this area depended to a large degree on the ministers of justice, little movement had so far taken place. As for medicine, even the WR so far abstained from recommendations in favour of a transition to a Bachelor and Master structure.

[153] Published in April 2005, the HRK data referred to in this section reflects the situation in autumn 2004. While the data is officially from December 2004, practically data collection was closed in October 2005 according to information from HRK staff.

the broad-scale conversion of their programme provision to Bachelor and Masters, many of them by Winter Semester 2007/08 (ibid).[154]

Under the new degree structure, HEIs in most *Länder* had the choice between a wide range of models, as long as the first degree was not shorter than three years and the total length of both cycles did not exceed five years. However, a minimum length of five years total for the Masters level turned out as the norm, so that only 3+2, 4+1 and 3½ +1½ remained viable options.[155] In practice, a range of formal and informal pressures led the great majority of universities and *Fachhochschulen* to opt for the 3+2 structure (HRK, 2005).[156] For university degrees, this implied a lengthening of total time for the Masters level by about one semester, for *Fachhochschul* degrees, by about two semesters. For Arts and Music, the negotiation of an exception was underway, allowing for the 4+2 model with a total of 6 years up to the Masters level (KMK *Sekretariat*, 2004a).

Titles for the new degrees were not differentiated by HEI type, programme profile or length, and were limited to the following list: B.A./M.A., B.Sc./M.Sc., B.Eng./M.Eng. and LL.B./LL.M.[157] Only for 'experience-related' (*weiterbildende*) and 'non-consecutive' Masters degrees, other titles—such as MBA—were allowed, and subject accretions were ruled out altogether. The Masters degree was defined as a *further* degree and could thus only be granted upon a prior Bachelor degree. The traditional degree titles continued to co-exist. *Magister* and *Diplom* were declared 'equivalent' to a Masters, and the traditional *Diplom (FH)* to a "four year Bachelor honours" degree. For state degrees in medicine and law, *Staatsexamen* continued to be the only possible degree title; for teacher training, introducing the titles B.Ed. and M.Ed. was seen as a solution. The new degree titles were widely agreed and quite firmly established by autumn 2004. Continued criticism only came from the DHV, AFT, and some individual universities, who would have liked a specification of the awarding institution in the degree title, such as 'M.Sc. (University Bonn)'.

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[154] 166 (72%) of the HRK member institutions responded. Of these, 116 said they wanted to introduce Bachelor and Master programmes on a broad scale, 68 between Winter semester 2005/06 and 2007/08.

[155] These regulations did not prevent students from choosing combinations such as 3+1 or 4+2. For fine arts and music, a regular length of 4+2 was envisaged.

[156] The great majority Bachelor programmes offered in Winter semester 2004/05 were 3 years long (84%), and the majority of Masters programmes took 2 years (61%). However, Bachelor programmes of 3½ and 4 years scheduled length also existed, as did Masters programmes of 1½ and 2 years scheduled length. Bachelor programmes of 3½ years and Master programmes of 1½ years were particularly widespread at *Fachhochschulen* (26% and 35.5%, respectively), notably in Engineering and Science, and in Bavaria and Baden-Wurttemberg (HRK, 2005).

[157] B.A./M.A. in language and cultural studies, sport, sport science, social sciences and fine arts, B.Sc./M.Sc. for mathematics, natural sciences, medicine (except *Staatsexamen degrees*), agriculture, forestry and food sciences, B.A./M.A. or B.Sc./M.Sc. in Economics, B.Eng./M.Eng. or B.Sc./M.Sc. in Engineering, and LL.B. or LL.M. in law.

Two degree classifications were in use: (1) 'research-' and 'application-oriented', and (2) 'consecutive', 'non-consecutive' and 'experience-related' degrees. Both classifications applied only to the Masters level, and were checked in the accreditation process. The delineations in both classifications were far from clear, but for the distinction of research versus application-orientation this was not a practical problem, as it did not have further consequences. The distinction of consecutive, non-consecutive, and experience-related Masters degrees however, had immediate funding implications. Consecutive Masters programmes entitled HEIs (via the KapVo) to public funding, whereas non-consecutive and experience-related Masters programmes had to be funded by HEIs themselves. Similarly, the federal ban on tuition fees extended only to consecutive Masters programmes. Student support, after an initially more restrictive regulation, paid for any Master programme that "builds on a Bachelor degree" (BAföG, 2006). In practice, HEIs had some say in how to define their degrees,[158] and were thus encouraged to behave strategically.[159]

6.4.3 Curricular governance

Between 1998 and 2004, curricular governance moved from a system predominantly based on state authorisation of programmes by the *Länder* to a nation-wide, decentralised accreditation system with stakeholder participation, as the national curriculum frameworks (RPOs) specifying subject-specific curricula were phased out. The new system initially conceived only for Bachelor and Masters programmes, was extended to all programmes.[160]

The new architecture for curricular governance was characterised by the following key features: (1) the *Länder* retained the ultimate responsibility for the quality and comparability of degrees, but delegated operational responsibility to the accreditation system; (2) state authorisation and accreditation coexisted; the

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[158] Roughly speaking, consecutive programmes would build on each other in terms of content, non-consecutive programmes did not have to, and work-based Masters required some years of prior professional experience. This typology reflected the transition from the old to the new degree structure: consecutive degrees were the immediate successors of the previous *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes, and as such mostly mono-disciplinary programme sequences. Non-consecutive and work-based programmes were new trans-disciplinary and market-driven add-ons. In practice, most Bachelor and Master programmes were consecutive; interdisciplinary 'non-consecutive' and experience-related Masters degrees were the exception.

[159] If they declared programmes as 'consecutive', the teaching of academics counted towards their teaching duty (*Lehrdeputat*), if they declared them as 'non-consecutive', they could exceed the length limit of five years up to the Master level, if they declared them as FE Masters, they could charge fees.

[160] To be precise, it continued to apply to existing degrees, but if new *Diplom* or *Magister* programmes were developed, they had to be accredited.

Länder were responsible for macro and resource planning, the accreditation system for curricular design, subject-specific standards and professional relevance; (3) a small central *Akkreditierungsrat* (AR) accredited and supervised a number of decentralised accreditation agencies; (4) the AR had a 'corporatist' composition, with representatives from HEIs, the *Länder*, academia, employers, and students; (5) new individual programmes rather than entire institutions had to be accredited; (6) HEIs carried the cost of accreditation. While the transfer of the AR into a public foundation was envisaged, it still lacked proper legal basis in autumn 2004.[161]

Whether the new system indeed increased curricular and programme diversity as intended when abolishing the national curriculum frameworks, was still unclear in autumn 2004. Isomorphic pressure emanated from subject and professional networks promoting inherited standards via accreditation, as well as from the risk aversion of HEIs.

Several aspects of the accreditation system were subject to ongoing dispute in autumn 2004, particularly: (1) problems of scale and capacity, given the small size of the AR itself and the limited supply of only six agencies; (2) costs of about €15,000 per programme; (3) lack of acceptance with some disciplinary and professional associations, and with some HEIs questioning the competence of the agencies; (4) lack of transparency, as the accreditation reports were not published and failed programmes were unknown; (5) lack of rigidity, given strong political and financial pressure to pass the new programmes; (6) tensions between the principles of common standards and competition between the agencies; (7) limited competition, given that only 6 agencies existed, some of them were subject group-specific and most related to a *Land* in practice; (8) mimetic pressure resulting from the lack of subject-specific criteria and the dependence upon peer judgements; (9) opposed to the last criticism, a loss of comparability and compatibility as national curriculum frameworks had been abandoned; and (10) only a small percentage of Bachelor and Masters programmes accredited so far (16% or 417 programmes in May 2004 according to the HRK 2004h: 6).[162]

Given this assessment, policy formulation in curricular governance was still far from complete by autumn 2004.

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[161] This changed in December 2004 when the "Foundation for accreditation of degree programmes in Germany" was created by KMK decision (KMK, 2004e). The intention to do so was announced in June 2004 (KMK, 2004c), specified in October (KMK, 2004a) and implemented by a law passed by the NRW Parliament, as the foundation was created under NRW law *("Gesetz zur Errichtung einer 'Stiftung zur Akkreditierung von Studiengängen in Deutschland'," 2005)*.

[162] By March 2005, this percentage had grown to 27.5% (808 accredited programmes in March 2005 out of 2934 Bachelor and Master programmes as of December 2005) (HRK, 2005).

6.4.4 Curricula

The introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes in Germany was associated with huge expectations for curricular reform, such as the introduction of new forms of teaching and learning, better student orientation and tutoring, more coherent and realistically planned curricula, increased outcome orientation, attention to student workload, more studies or internships abroad and the internationalisation of course content, increased inter-disciplinary orientation, more attention to key skills, and better preparation for the labour market (*Stifterverband,* 2002; *Wissenschaftsrat*, 2000a).

It was hoped that some of these reforms would contribute to bringing together the *de jure* and *de facto* length of studies, and decrease drop-out rates. Given stagnant or shrinking funding and an unchanged system of capacity planning prescribing subject-specific teacher-student ratios through the KapVo, these ambitions were difficult to realise. As Bachelor and Masters programmes were often offered in parallel to the traditional programmes, they drew on the same course supply. This limited the extent to which the new curricula could divert from the traditional. It is too early to judge to what extent the curricular reform aspirations were realised, but some broad trends are already visible.

A tangible change was the general introduction of ECTS and modularisation, which implied the move from large intermediary and final exams to continuous assessment at the end of each semester, and to more structured—and often more tightly packed—curricula. This constituted a major change notably for the former *Magister* programmes. Moreover, ECTS and modularisation were often extended to the traditional programmes as well; by *Länder* regulation or voluntarily. The shortened time for the first degree increased student awareness of time limits. With the increased frequency of exams and the public debate about the introduction of student fees, this tended to increase student attendance of lectures and seminars.

Many curricular features of the new degrees—such as the professional relevance of the curriculum, the inclusion of skills, modularisation and ECTS—were formally prescribed and subject to accreditation. As not all of these requirements were clearly operationalised by the political bodies, accreditation agencies had a huge influence. Accreditation criteria also required academic staff to engage much more consciously in curriculum planning than they were used to, i.e., to define the aims of curricula and coordinate the contribution of different modules. Realising curricular reform ambitions such as better tutoring and new teaching modes also required more staff input than previously. As HEIs were not allowed to adjust teacher-student ratios and the new curricula tended to be tightly packed, some HEIs experienced real capacity problems.

The KMK Structural Guidelines did not prescribe a certain curricular model for the Bachelor degree. However, the stipulation that any Bachelor degree—from a university or *Fachhochschule*—must "qualify for a profession" had major implications for curricula, such as more attention to skills and the relevance of courses offered. The initial reform aspiration to increase inter-disciplinary orientation was pushed aside by the dominant concern with degree length and led to a political preference for early concentration on a single subject. At the Masters level, a tendency towards increasing specialisation was visible even if it was not laid down in regulations; it emerged from efforts to develop a clear profile.

Modularisation remained a disputed aspect of curricular reform. Students criticised that their workload was still not properly considered and ECTS points were assigned based on contact hours instead (fzs, 2003a: 11). In the absence of regulations or agreement on the size of modules, most HEIs—or even departments within—modularised their programmes in isolation from each other. It could therefore be questioned whether the introduction of ECTS contributed to easing mobility (ibid). Similarly, the tension between the demands of increased curricular coherence through larger thematic blocks and student mobility were yet unsolved.

6.4.5   Access

By autumn 2004, much had changed in the area of access, but only the changes regarding the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters level were immediately connected to the introduction of the new degrees.

The effect of the move to the new degree structure on participation in HE was ambiguous. On the one hand, increased participation was one of the aspirations linked to the new degrees. Entry to HE to 40% of an age group had become an official aim of Federal government (SPD & *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, 2002); entry rates to HE did indeed increase significantly from 28% in 1998 to 37.5% in 2004 (OECD, 2000:173; *Statistisches Bundesamt*, 2006). On the other hand, the increasing participation-agenda was overshadowed by the context of austerity at the *Länder* level. The preoccupation of *Länder* ministries was how to make it possible to maintain undergraduate places, possibly improve teaching quality *and* still be able to offer Masters programmes (Schmoll, 2004; Witte & Schreiterer, 2003a).

By autumn 2004, the majority of *Länder* had shortened the number of years of schooling towards the *Abitur* from thirteen to twelve (Burtscheid & Rubner, 2003),[163] and tighter regulations for a common core curriculum in upper secondary education were discussed.

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[163]   This held for Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Saxony, Saarland, and from 2004/05 onwards also for Lower Saxony, Baden-Wurttemberg and Bavaria.

In subject areas with nationwide excess demand, the Framework Act now allowed universities to select a greater percentage of new entrants according to their own criteria (60%), and applicants with good GPAs had a better chance to be admitted to the university of their choice. The reform did not increase the selectiveness of entry, but only changed the *mode* of selection for a handful of subjects (less than 3% of degree programmes). However, the change had an important domino effect on degree programmes with local excess-demand (about 43% of programme supply), as many *Länder* used the opportunity to extend the new rule (special analysis, HRK, 2004c).

Entry to the Masters level was selective, and there was a tendency among the *Länder* of setting more or less formal overall 'quotas' for the transition between the two cycles. While the Framework Act did not make provisions in this regard, the KMK structural guidelines ruled that access to the Masters level should be made subject to "further specific entry requirements" in addition to a first degree (KMK, 2003c: 4). The existence of such requirements was to be checked in the accreditation process; additionally, the *Länder* had the right to reserve to themselves the authorisation of the criteria set by the HEIs. Furthermore, the Bachelor degree was defined as the 'normative degree' (*Regelabschluss*) legally interpreted such that at most 50% of Bachelor graduates were supposed to continue to the Masters level (ibid: 3). The precise implementation of this general idea differed between *Länder* and by subject area, and was strongly disputed. Given the level of dispute, further adjustments in the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase seemed likely. However, in light of the strong pressure exerted by the capacity logic of the *Länder*, it seems likely that transition rates from the Bachelor to the Masters level will be determined more by supply constraints than by the level of demand.

6.4.6 Transition to employment

In the university sector, the legal requirement for the new university Bachelor degree to "qualify for a profession" implied a much earlier common exit point from studies to employment than before. While the regulatory framework was set, few Bachelor graduates had yet entered the labour market. The fact that policy formulation had resulted in such an ambitious reform reflected a considerable degree of paradigm change although considerable adaptations among academia and employers were still required for implementation. Resistance was concentrated in fields regulated by professional organisations or where traditional disciplinary self-conception was at odds with a short first degree. Ultimately, the degree of change might come to differ strongly between disciplines, and be more pronounced in business administration and social sciences than for example, in law, pharmacy, or theology.

In the *Fachhochschul s*ector, the establishment of Bachelor and Masters degrees also implied profound changes in the relationship between HE and the labour market, as the new Bachelor degree was usually one year shorter and the new Masters degree one year longer than the traditional *Diplom (FH).* Paradoxically, the dominance of the three-year Bachelor in *Fachhochschulen* had often come at the cost of sacrificing one of the traditional internships or the experience-related final thesis. In spite of the reduction of the programme by one year compared to the *Diplom (FH),* the qualification level was largely considered equivalent. The existence of Bachelor and Masters degrees at both universities and *Fachhochschulen* also called for the adjustment of pay scales and career paths in the public and private sector. Access to careers in the higher public service for Masters graduates from *Fachhochschulen* was still dependent upon special authorisation in the accreditation process and further impeded by cultural barriers.

While encouraging lifelong learning had been among the initial rationales for the reform, this was not fully reflected in the design of the new degree structure. Consecutive and non-consecutive programmes could be studied after some years of work experience, but students then lost the entitlement to student support above the age of 30 or if they had earned too much. The classification of Masters programmes included experience-related programmes, but these occupied a niche in overall provision. Moreover, the differential treatment of these programmes with respect to fees and student support (see section 6.4.7 on 'funding') was at odds with the political intention to encourage the labour market entry of Bachelor graduates.

To sum up, while the legal provision for a changed relationship between HE and the labour market was largely in place, mentalities and practices still needed to adjust, and the overall outcome was not yet clear in 2004.

6.4.7 Funding

The context of austerity was not a driving force behind the introduction of the new degrees, but did shape the process as a side condition. From 1998 to 2004, the HE system continued to operate under extreme budget pressure, and—with the exception of a few ear-marked federal funds channelled through DAAD and HRK programmes—no extra funding was made available for the introduction of the new degrees.

In principle, the allocation of teaching funds through the KapVo system remained unchanged until autumn 2004. However, the reform of the degree structure had put the system under pressure for two reasons (a) the extension of total degree length for the Masters level to five years, and (b) teaching staff-intensive curricular requirements in the Bachelor phase. In light of the federal aim to increase entry rates to HE to 40% of an age group, this pressure was even more

acute. Given that no additional funds were available, *Länder* ministries had to make a tough trade-off between teacher-student ratios and the number of student places at the Bachelor and Masters levels(KMK, 2003b; Weegen, 2004; Witte & Schreiterer, 2003a). The general tendency was to keep the undergraduate provision of study places about constant, slightly improve teacher-student ratios at that level, and restrict access to the Masters level. Most *Länder* had not yet formalised their policies in this regard however. The introduction of the new degrees also raised more fundamental challenges: as RPOs had been abandoned, HEIs were now expected to develop their own curricula and the standardised CNWs were at odds with the new philosophy. By autumn 2004, it became increasingly clear that the introduction of the new degrees would significantly contribute to overcoming the prevailing system of capacity planning. Initial ideas for alternative instruments were already consulted within the KMK (KMK *Sekretariat*, 2004d).

The debate over tuition fees had intensified from 1998 to 2004,; but was as such unrelated to the introduction of the new degrees, and no fees were introduced except for long-term students studying for a second degree (other than Masters degrees as part of the new degree structure, see below).[164] The regulations for student support under the Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) were adjusted; an amendment of the act had been passed in 2001 lowering eligibility barriers, slightly increasing the maximum grant, and limiting the maximum loan burden on graduates to €10,000 (BMBF, 2006).

With respect to two-cycle degrees, the main changes resulted from the fact that the ban on student fees and the student support scheme traditionally applied only to studies up to the first degree "qualifying for a profession". To encourage students to opt for the new degrees, both the federal ban on student fees and eligibility for student support were extended up to the Masters level. The adjustment of the federal ban on student fees was incomplete however, as it only applied to 'consecutive' Masters programmes. Student support was initially confined to Masters programmes in the same discipline as the preceding Bachelor degree, but then extended to include trans-disciplinary Masters programmes, the only condition being that the Masters had to "build on the preceding Bachelor degree" (BAföG, 2006: Art. 7.1a).[165] There was still some confusion on these definitions in 2004, rendering eligibility unclear and leading to variances in local

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[164] Several *Länder* introduced tuition fees for students significantly exceeding regular time to degree (so-called 'long-term students'). The introduction of fees for the first degree was forbidden by the Sixth HRG Amendment in 2002. Several *Länder* filed a constitutional court case against this regulation, and the Constitutional Court decided in January 2005 that the Federation was not entitled to forbid tuition. Beginning with the academic year 2006/07, several *Länder* will raise tuition fees, and the situation will alter profoundly.

[165] The BAföG reform in 1998 had introduced student support only for 'consecutive' Masters programmes, in 2001 this was amended to include trans-disciplinary Masters programmes.

and regional interpretations. Student support was only paid up to the age of 30, and for students who had worked for more than three years after their Bachelor degree, and eligibility was determined based on their own rather than their parents' financial situation.[166]

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[166] For recent updates of the overall funding situation and models in German HE, see also Ziegele (2002) and Jaeger et al. (2005).

7   The Netherlands

Similar to the last chapter, this case study begins by introducing the major actors in national HE policy and their capabilities. The second section depicts the Dutch HE system in early 1998 before the reform of national degree structures, which is referred to as the introduction of the "Bachelor and Masters system"[167] (commonly also abbreviated as 'BaMa' in the Netherlands). The third section chronologically traces the process of policy formulations on the new degree structure before the policy change up until autumn 2004 is recapitulated in section 7.4.

7.1   Actors and their capabilities

At the governmental level, Dutch HE from 1998 to 2004 was the responsibility of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (henceforth referred to as "the minister", and his Ministry as 'the Ministry' or 'Ministry responsible for HE').[168] For some subject areas, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality also had responsibility. HE was regulated by the HE and Research Act (WHW, 1992, henceforth also referred to as 'HE Act'). New policies were formulated in the *Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoeksplan* (HOOP)—since 2000; this was done in a four-year cycle and could lead to proposals to change the HE Act. These were discussed in the Lower House (*Tweede Kamer*) of the Parliament. Before legislation became effective, the Upper House (*Eerste Kamer*) also had to agree; it could however not make amendments.

Like the Dutch political system in general, the policy-making process in HE was characterised by a high degree of consensus orientation, often referred to as the 'polder model' (see also Theisens, 2004). This implied lengthy discussions—both formal and informal—by the Minister, not only with a wide range of actors and stakeholders but also in Parliament, before any change of legislation was decided. Advice from expert commissions and commissioned studies played an important role. The Education Council (*Onderwijsraad*) stood out as the

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[167]   As in the German case study, I use the more common English terminology of "Masters" degrees/programmes although they are commonly referred to as "Master" degrees/programmes (without 's') in the Netherlands.

[168]   In the Netherlands, the responsibility for HE was formally held by the Minister, not the Ministry. In 1998, Loek Hermans was Minister of Education. Under Maria van der Hoeven, who proceeded him in summer 2002, HE policy was delegated first to Secretary of State Annette Nijs (July 2002-May 2004) and then to Marc Rutte.

permanent advisory body set up by the government specifically for the area of education.[169]

The most important stakeholders regularly consulted by the Ministry were the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Universiteiten,* VSNU), the Association of *hogescholen* (HBO-*raad*)—both in fact associations of vice-chancellors from the respective institutional types[170]—and the student representatives from the Dutch National Students Association (*Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg,* ISO) and LSVb (*Landelijke Studenten Vakbond*). Employer organisations were equally taken into account. Among them, this study concentrates on the views of VNO-NCW, the biggest Dutch employer organisation representing medium to large enterprises.[171] Once the Dutch accreditation organisation (*Nederlandse Accreditatie Organisatie*, NAO) was created in 2002 as a result of the policy formulation process, it soon contributed to further policy formulation on the design of the new degrees, albeit largely informally. In autumn 2003, it was extended to form the Dutch-Flemish accreditation organisation (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie*, NVAO).

A range of other important actors in Dutch HE policy should also be mentioned even if they receive only cursory attention in this study in order to concentrate the analysis: In the area of research, these were the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen,* KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschapplijk Onderzoek,* NWO). NUFFIC, the Dutch organisation for international cooperation in higher education, was regularly consulted by the Ministry on issues of internationalisation. University academics were represented through VAWO (*Vereniging van en voor Personeel aan Universiteiten en Onderzoeksinstellingen*). VAWO concentrated on personnel and labour issues, and therefore did not play a major role in issues of general HE policy. Moreover, it did not hold strong views on the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes.

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[169] The Advisory Council for Science and Technology (*Adviesraad voor het Wetenschaps- en Technologiebeleid,* AWT) assumed this role in the area of research. In various cases, the Social Economic Council (*Sociaal-Economische Raad,* SER) was also consulted.

[170] Universities and *hogescholen* were the two main types of HEIs in the Netherlands (see section 7.2.1). Additionally, there was a private education sector in continuous and higher education, represented by PAEPON (*Platform van Aangewezen/Erkende Particuliere Onderwijsinstellingen in Nederland*) which enrolled 5-7% of students. Given constraints of time and space, this organisation and developments in this sector have been omitted from the analysis.

[171] *MKB-Nederland*, which represented the small- and medium-sized companies, was also consulted by the Ministry.

7.2   Institutional setting in early 1998

7.2.1   Institutional types

The Dutch HE system in 1998 was characterised by a strong binary divide between the 14 universities providing 'academic education' (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs,* WO) and about 50 institutions providing so-called 'higher professional education' (*hoger beroepsonderwijs,* HBO)—i.e., HE with an immediate professional/vocational reference—the *hogescholen*.[172] This conceptualisation was maintained in spite of the fact that universities also traditionally offered a wide range of clearly professional programmes, such as engineering, law, medicine, accountancy, or pharmacy. Research was part of the mission of universities and they were publicly funded for it, while *hogescholen* were not. Accordingly, only universities could grant doctoral degrees. The divide was also reflected in strongly differing qualification levels and the pay scales of faculty at universities and *hogescholen*, with few *hogeschool* faculty holding doctorates. The perception that 'academic education' was superior to 'higher professional education' was widespread in the Netherlands, thus implying a status hierarchy.

The binary divide also found expression in different entry requirements for students of universities and *hogescholen*, with schooling paths for the two institutional types already diverging at the age of 12 (see section 7.2.5 on 'access'). This was linked to the widespread idea that there were two types of students, 'thinkers'—to be trained in universities—and 'doers'—to be trained in *hogescholen* (see also Report Committee Review Degrees, 2005). Permeability between the two systems was possible, but not without obstacles: *Hogeschool* students could either enter the first year of university upon successful completion of the first year of *hogeschool*, or seek admission into a higher year of a university programme upon completion of a full *hogeschool* degree, based on exemptions granted in individual cases.

Overall, *hogescholen* made up an important part of the Dutch HE system. Massification in the Netherlands was by and large accommodated by the *hogeschool* sector, so in 1998 about 2/3 of students studied at *hogescholen* (290,530; 64,5%) and only 1/3 at universities (160,304; 35,5%) (Huisman & Kaiser, 2001). Accordingly, the pressure to 'professionalise' university degrees was quite low.

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[172]   In the period around 1998, many of these institutions were in the process of merging which is why data on the exact numbers vary.

7.2.2 Degree structure

Universities offered so-called *doctoraal* programmes leading directly to the Masters level, granting the degrees *meester* (*mr.*, in law), *ingenieur* (*ir.*, in engineering), and *doctorandus* (*drs.*, in all other fields). These programmes had a work-load of four years full-time study in most fields except for engineering, agriculture, the sciences, and philosophy of science, where the stipulated length of studies had recently been increased to five years. Programmes in the medical field took six years (five in dentistry and pharmacy), with a first qualification after four years and another professional qualification thereafter. The *hogescholen* also offered four-year programmes leading to a the title *baccalaureus* (*bc.*) or *ingenieur* (*ing.*) in engineering but due to the lower entry level for *hogeschool* programmes (see section 7.2.5 on 'access'), these were only equivalent to the Bachelor level. In only a few selected subject areas such as architecture, engineering, fine arts and music, did they offer publicly recognised (and funded) Masters-level programmes, the so-called 'second phase' (*tweede phase*). As *hogescholen* were not degree-granting under Dutch law, strictly speaking they awarded only 'certificates'. While the immediate implications of this distinction were unclear,[173] it served to amplify the status hierarchy.

Besides the Dutch titles, *hogeschool* graduates were allowed to use the title 'Bachelor' and university graduates the title 'Master' in the international context. Nevertheless, the system implied similar recognition problems abroad as described for Germany, i.e., university degrees were often not recognised as Masters level in the Anglo-Saxon world as they were seen as first (and thus undergraduate) degrees.

In addition to these regular programmes, both universities and *hogescholen* had begun to offer a range of so-called 'post-initial' (*postinitiële*) Masters programmes in the further education field, often triggered by immediate market demands. At universities these 'post-initial' programmes were usually studied on top of a traditional Masters-level degree —and at *hogescholen* on top of a traditional Bachelor-level degree plus a certain number of years work experience—a difference which sheds light on the different conceptualisation of *hogeschool* versus university education in the Netherlands. At *hogescholen*, 'initial' education was perceived as complete at Bachelor level whereas at universities, 'initial' education was perceived as complete only at Masters level; 'post-initial' Masters

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173   The confusion about this concept is exemplified by the fact that, as part of the 2002 Amendment of the HE Act, the Ministry intended to give *universities* degree granting power (Tweede Kamer, 2001a) – which implies that they also were not degree granting up to that point. In the university sector however, this lack of degree granting power had slightly different connotations from that in the *hogeschool* sector: It implied the subtle distinction that degree titles were originally not granted by universities, but that it was an individual right of graduates to carry a degree title upon graduation from a university.

programmes had to come on top of that. These programmes were not accommodated by the existing (legal) framework of HE: in the case of *hogescholen* because they were generally not allowed to offer programmes at Masters level; in the case of universities, because they fell outside of the national quality assurance system (see next section). Moreover, they were not publicly funded.

Tiered degree structures had a history in the Netherlands. Until the 1982 University Act, all university programmes had taken longer than five years, and a *kandidaat* exam had been common after three years of university education. It was however, perceived as an intermediate degree rather than opening real opportunities on the labour market. The *kandidaat* exam fell victim to the shortening of most university degrees to four years in 1982 as a consequence of budget constraints. In 1995 a senior advisory body to the government, the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*, WRR), had recommended the introduction of 'phased' structures in HE (WRR, 1995). While education at *hogescholen* was to remain largely unchanged, university education was to be structured into a Bachelor phase with a clear focus on general academic education and a graduate phase divided into two major options: graduate schools for the training of future researchers and professional schools for those who were to enter the world of work (ibid: 157 cc). The report further recommended that while the first cycle and research training should remain publicly funded, students and employers should make significant contributions to professional schools (ibid: 168). As the report fell into another period of severe budget cuts in HE, this triggered suspicions that its ideas were just a cost-cutting device, and it was therefore quickly rejected.

7.2.3 Curricular governance

The Dutch system of curricular governance could build on a long-standing tradition of quality assurance based on self-evaluation and peer review conducted by the academic community under the co-ordination of the VSNU and HBO-*raad* (the so-called *visitatiestelsel*, i.e., site-visit system). This system was supervised by the Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs* or *Onderwijsinspectie*, henceforth 'Education Inspectorate'), which monitored the evaluation process and its follow-up and intervened in problematic cases (the so-called 'meta-evaluation'), but in fact it was largely run by academics themselves. Curricular frameworks were agreed by disciplinary associations working under the VSNU and HBO-*raad*. Curricular diversity was significantly higher in the university than the *hogeschool* sector, where about 2/3 of the curriculum tended to be commonly defined in terms of learning outcomes. The government did not interfere with the development of curricula, which was a matter of HEIs with one exception: A commission called *Adviescommissie Onderwijsaanbod* (ACO) ensured the overall coherence, relevance, and efficiency

of the national programme offer of Dutch HEIs (henceforth referred to as 'macro-efficiency'). Their agreement was conditional for registration in a national register (*Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs*, CROHO), which was simultaneously the precondition for public funding of the programme. This system did not cover the 'post-initial' Masters programmes.

As *hogescholen* were not allowed to grant degrees under Dutch law, they had developed an international route for offering their Masters degrees. They partnered with British universities (mainly former polytechnics), which through their degree granting power accredited the degrees offered in the Netherlands by the *hogescholen*—a practice referred to as 'u-turn construction'. To enhance the legitimacy of these degrees in the Dutch context, the Dutch Validation Council (DVC) was established in 1997. This was however, an interim solution.

7.2.4 Curricula

Studies in the Netherlands were classified into *alfa* (Humanities), *gamma* (Social Sciences), *bèta* (Science and Engineering), and Medical studies. Similar to Germany, *de facto* study length was above the stipulated length, although the difference was less pronounced (In 1996, average time to degree was 5.8 years (Huisman & Kaiser, 2001)). Realistic and student-oriented planning of university programmes had been a big issue in the 1990s, curricula had been revised with a view to student interests, and student guidance had been improved by strengthening the links between public funding of HEIs and the quality of teaching. Based on consultation with student unions, the VSNU, and the HBO-*raad*, these efforts had culminated in the 'Quality and Completability Act' of 1996 (*Wet Kwaliteit en Studeerbaarheid*) (Eurydice, 2000a). Financial support for students also provided strong incentives for completing studies in time. A national credit point system very similar to ECTS (based on 1,680 hours of workload per year: 42 weeks at 40 hours each) had been introduced in the 1982 'University Act', and degree programmes were modularised since then. Degree programmes at universities were usually structured into a general one-year propaedeutic phase which assumed a (self-)selective function, followed by three years of subject-specific concentrated studies. Since the 1985 '*Hogeschool Act*', *hogescholen* followed the curricular structure of universities. The division of the academic year was left up to institutions, and a variety of systems existed across the country. Similarly, internships were not regulated. While they existed in both university and *hogeschool* programmes, they were more prevalent in the *hogeschool* sector (usually one full year).

7.2.5 Access

Generally, access to HE was open to those who fulfilled the respective state-defined entry qualifications unless capacity or labour-market constraints necessitated the imposition of a *numerus clausus*, which was the case only in the university sector and only in very few subject areas, notably medicine. In those cases, available capacities were distributed on the basis of a weighted lottery system. In 1998 however, changes of that system were under way that would give good secondary school graduates priority in the procedure and allow HEIs to select on their own criteria, within limits.

Entry requirements between universities and *hogescholen* differed regarding type and length of schooling, and streaming for those types already begun from the age of 12 years. While entry to university required six years of general 'academic' schooling (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs,* VWO; 30.6% of first year students in 1998), *hogescholen* could be entered upon completion of five years of general secondary (*Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs,* HAVO; 30.3%) or senior secondary vocational education (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs,* MBO; 20.9%). This was preceded by eight years of primary education starting at the age of four years, so university entrants would usually be 18 and *hogeschool* entrants 17 years old. For some *hogeschool* programmes, particularly in the arts, additional entry requirements (such as musical talent) could be imposed. Furthermore, it was possible for universities to require a maximum of two secondary school subjects as requirements for enrolling in a particular programme; though there was ample room for compensation (Boezerooy, 1999; Broekhof, 1995; Eurydice, 2000a). Looking at qualifications held by *hogeschool* students, in 1998 13.4% held a VWO certificate (HBO-*raad*, 2005), i.e., they could potentially have opted for a university programme. Overall, the net entry rate into tertiary education type A—mostly universities and *hogescholen*—was 52% in 1998 (OECD, 2000).[174]

As participation in HE had grown only moderately and gradually in the 1980s and 1990s, and the growth had largely been absorbed by the hogeschool sector, massification and overcrowding was not a major issue in Dutch HE in 1998. Overall the access regime was based on an egalitarian tradition, and so-called 'selection in front of the door' was seen as problematic while 'selection behind the door' through tight propaedeutic examinations after the first year, was common practice.

7.2.6 Transition to employment

Transition from HE to work in the Netherlands in 1998 could generally be described as comparatively unproblematic. Links between the *hogescholen* and

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[174] See footnote 109 in section 6.2.5 of the German case study for an explanation.

employers were traditionally close, and different innovative models existed for combining studies and work (Boezerooy, 2003). As they made up 1/3 of HE graduates, there was an under- rather than an oversupply of university graduates and employers valued the supply of both academically and professionally trained graduates (Allen, Boezerooy, de Weert, & van der Velden, 2000). The Netherlands had no tradition of separate 'state' degrees in particular fields. The public service traditionally recruited from a wide range of disciplines from universities and *hogescholen*, and pay was not based exclusively on degree types, but also on individual qualification. In some professions— in some fields of psychology for example –, the HE degree did not convey the immediate right to practice, but further training was required upon graduation. There was no major problem with graduate unemployment, but there was a scarcity of graduates in the fields of engineering and the sciences. In fields related to information and communication technology, students were often recruited even before graduation.

7.2.7 Funding

The main funding of HEIs was provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and constituted about two thirds of the total income of HEIs. The distribution of that budget between HEIs was determined according to a formula that was partly performance-based. It was provided as a block grant, which for universities included a research (about two thirds) and teaching component (about one third); for *hogescholen* only teaching. While the funding model was adjusted several times prior to 1998 and the model operational in 1998 constituted an interim solution, the teaching allocation for universities always included a significant "money follows the student" component where funding was based on the number of new entrants as well as the number of graduates, thus setting incentives for recruitment and retention. The incentives were further strengthened by student fees, which amounted to €1,248 per student per academic year in 1998/99 and could be kept by the institution (Frans Kaiser, Vossensteyn, & Koelman, 2001: 132). The funding of *hogescholen* had remained largely unchanged over the years and was based primarily on graduation rates and time to degree, making it performance-based as well.

In the decade prior to 1998, overall public expenses for universities and *hogescholen* fell from about 1.2% to about 1.0% of gross domestic product (GDP), a development that mostly went back to the reduction of the overall university budget, as public expenses for *hogescholen* remained nearly stable (CBS-statline, 2005).[175] Funding per student declined in real terms over that period in both university and *hogeschool* education (VSNU, 2001).

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[175] According to OECD (2001: 82) numbers, total expenditure on tertiary education (type A and B) as a percentage of GDP was 1.2% in 1998.

Public student funding consisted of three components: first, a basic loan for the nominal duration of a degree programme which was converted into a non-repayable grant if the student met the performance requirements (obtaining at least 50% of the stipulated credits in the first year and the entire degree within the nominal duration plus an extra two years, i.e., six to seven years); second, a means-tested (based on parental income) supplementary grant received by about 30% of students; third, an additional voluntary loan at a subsidised interest rate (Frans Kaiser et al., 2001; Vossensteyn, 2005). In the academic year 1998/99, the maximum basic loan/grant was €193 for those living away from home (otherwise €57), the supplementary grant €196, and the voluntary loan €169 (MOCenW, 2003b).

7.3   Policy formulation

Policy formulation on the two-cycle degree structure in the Netherlands can broadly be distinguished by three main phases: a phase of early initiatives even before the Dutch signature on the Bologna declaration (section 7.3.1); a phase characterised by the development of a shared agenda for a major amendment of the National HE Act that laid the legal basis for the new degree structure (section 7.3.2) and the debate on the details of the legal reform in parliament (section 7.3.4); and the phase after the passing of the Amendment in summer 2002 (sections 7.3.5 – 7.3.7). The reforms began under the term of office of the liberal politician Loek Hermans, who became the new Minister in charge of HE in the *Cabinet Wim Kok II* in August 1998; a coalition government made up of the Social Democrats (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) and two liberal parties (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD, and *Democraten 66*, D66). While the key aspects of the new degree structure were decided in Herman's period and bore his signature, the process was characterised by a high degree of continuity, as the conservative coalition government that took over in July 2002 followed the set course. An important characteristic of the Dutch policy formulation process is that many HEIs took the initiative to move to the new degrees even before the legal framework was established, so that the full transition to the new degree structure after the passing of the Amendment proceeded quickly.

7.3.1   Prelude: initiatives before the Bologna declaration

This section traces the early initiatives from the HE sector and government to prepare the transition to the two-cycle degree structure before the Bologna declaration (sub-sections 7.3.1.1 and 7.3.1.2), and the Dutch signature on the declaration (sub-section 7.3.1.3).

7.3.1.1 Early university initiatives and government agenda HOOP 2000

As is clear from section 7.3.2, the two-cycle degree structure was not without history in the Netherlands; a first university degree after three years, the *kandidaat*, existed prior to 1982, albeit as an intermediate degree without labour market relevance.

In 1998, the Ministry reintroduced the legal possibility for universities to grant the *kandidaat* to facilitate international recognition of the subsequent degrees (i.e., *doctorandus, meester, ingenieur*) at the Masters level, which could more easily be presented as 'second cycle' if universities were able to issue a first degree after three years. This reform however, was not linked to any attempt at systemic change. In the same year, new momentum for the idea of tiered degree structures came from the European context. The fact that four major European countries, three of them neighbours of the Netherlands, had signed the Sorbonne declaration was taken very seriously in the Dutch HE sector from the very beginning. Combined with the reintroduction of the *kandidaat* examination and the earlier interest of both universities and *hogescholen* to offer 'post-initial' Masters programmes, this fostered a widespread reform movement. As early as autumn 1998 and spring 1999, Dutch universities were seriously discussing and experimenting with the Bachelor-Masters structure. This coincided with ongoing curricular reform efforts in a number of institutions, such as the introduction of a 'major-minor' model. Bremer (1999) speaks of a "collective realisation process" that unfolded a very special dynamic.

The Ministry's agenda for the HOOP 2000 should be understood against this background. Published in February 1999, the overall motto was "enhanced flexibility, internationalisation and deregulation" in HE (MOCenW, 1999a). Concerned with labour market shortages of HE graduates, the need for increased flexibility in learning paths, more opportunities for lifelong learning, and with explicit reference to the Sorbonne declaration; the introduction of Bachelor-Masters structures surfaced as a possible solution several times in the report. Then Minister Loek Hermans announced that he would discuss the implications of the Sorbonne declaration with the sector.

In the months that followed, the introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure into Dutch HE was debated at a number of national conferences, such as the VSNU strategy meeting in April (VSNU, 1999), a NUFFIC workshop in May (NUFFIC, 1999), and a conference of the association of university managers in August (VUBM, 1999). The discussions at these meetings displayed a remarkable readiness for major reform throughout the sector. At the NUFFIC workshop in May 1999, "the participants (…) unanimously agreed with a general introduction of the Bachelor-Masters structure" (NUFFIC, 1999: 2).

7.3.1.2 Advice of the Education Council: 'HE in international context'

The first formal document that proposed concrete policy directions regarding the introduction of a two-cycle degree structure was the advice of the Education Council "Higher education in international context" (*Onderwijsraad*, 1999b). Published by demand of the Ministry and meant to inform the internationalisation policy for HE in the context of the preparation of the HOOP 2000, its timing—May 1999—fell between the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations.

Four international developments were referred to in the document: (1) the creation of a European HE area (notably, the Sorbonne declaration); (2) increasing international competition in the sphere of HE; (3) the rise of virtual education; and (4) the increasing dominance of English as the language of instruction and research. While all four were interpreted as requiring action, the creation of the European HE area and the Sorbonne declaration were given a particularly prominent place in the report. Notably, the Sorbonne declaration was presented in the wider context of ongoing European efforts to create a common HE area since the 1980s: the mobility programmes of the EU and the Lisbon convention on recognition of degrees. Interestingly, the declaration was interpreted as proposing "an undergraduate-graduate structure based on the Anglo-Saxon model", and the German legal reform in 1998 to allow for these degrees was explicitly referred to. Already on the first page of the report, these developments were used to derive the question of whether the Dutch degree system should be adjusted.

The report also reflected a number of recent Dutch developments and concerns with respect to the compatibility of its degree structure, such as the problems with the recognition of the Dutch *doctoraal* degrees at the Masters level due to the absence of a prior first degree, the proliferation of 'post-initial' Masters degrees without clear legal standing, and the 'u-turn construction' used by Dutch *hogescholen* to make their graduate degrees recognised by British universities. It was highlighted that the option opened in Art. 7.21 of the HE Act for university graduates to use the Masters title and for *hogeschool* graduates to use the Bachelor title did not solve this problem, as it did not imply proper recognition of these titles under Dutch law. Similar to problems with the curriculum frameworks (RPOs) in Germany, the lengthy procedures for registration in the CROHO were considered an obstacle for HEIs to react swiftly to international developments by setting up new programmes in English.

Against this background, the Education Council recommended the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes into the Dutch HE system. The reasons highlighted for this recommendation were to increase the scope of European cooperation as well as the transparency and international competitiveness of the Dutch HE system. Interestingly, the German path to allow for the new degrees as an additional option to the traditional degrees was explicitly referred to as a possible choice for the Dutch HE system though the Education Council did express a clear preference for full conversion of the system; interpreted as a "turnaround of the current situation". The "Anglo-

Saxon" degrees would become the norm, but the option for a student to use the traditional Dutch degrees should be maintained, with clear equivalences formulated between the traditional *hogeschoo*l and the Bachelor degree, and the traditional university and the Masters degrees.

Interestingly, several basic choices were present in this early document that were maintained throughout the ensuing policy formulation process. First, the Education Council emphasised that the transition to the new degree structure could be "achieved while maintaining the existing binary system" (ibid: 11). Second, and related, it recommended the conversion of existing *hogeschool* programmes to Bachelor programmes and the division of existing university programmes into a three-year Bachelor and a one- to three-year Masters programme (depending on the respective length of the traditional programme). It was thus not envisioned that *hogescholen* would regularly offer Masters degrees. Third, the university Bachelor was conceived as point for mobility rather than an exit point from university studies—and explicitly compared to the traditional *kandidaatsdiploma* (ibid: 13). Accordingly, it was highlighted that the system of student funding needed to be adjusted in such a way that it would not pose any obstacles towards the continuation of studies beyond this point. Fourth, the differential treatment of the 'post-initial' Masters programmes was already envisaged; regarding curricular governance, the report articulated the idea that quality assurance for most degree programmes could remain unchanged and that new measures were only needed for those programmes that fell outside of the scope of the CROHO i.e., the 'post-initial' Masters programmes. Only for those programmes the report envisaged an accreditation system, although it recommended further research in this area. Furthermore, it suggested that the name "Master of Science" should be confined to CROHO-registered Masters degrees, i.e., those resulting from the conversion of former *doctoraal* programmes (ibid: 12) Surprisingly, "Master of Arts" was not mentioned in the report. Finally, the seed for the distinction between ordinary and "research Masters" was already planted: the report proposed the name "M.Phil." for research-oriented two-year Masters degrees that were to give direct access to a shortened Doctorate phase of three years (traditionally, the Doctorate took four years in the Netherlands).

7.3.1.3 The Dutch signature on the Bologna declaration

Shortly after the publication of the Education Council recommendation, in June 1999 the Dutch HE minister signed the Bologna declaration, having consulted the HBO-*raad*, VSNU, LSVb, and ISO before doing so. Interestingly, he added a "declaration of proceedings" to his signature in which he laid down the "terms of reference" for signing the declaration (MOCenW, 1999b: 56-57). Among them was that the binary system was not to be put into question by the transition toward two-cycle degree structures, and that *hogescholen*, according to Dutch understanding, cover only the Bachelor level while Dutch universities cover both

Bachelor and Masters levels. It was explicitly highlighted that this implied the existence of "two types of Bachelor degrees". The different length of *hogeschool* versus university Bachelor degrees was also addressed and justified by the different length of required prior secondary education; as an immediate continuation of current practice, *hogeschool* Bachelor degrees would build on five years of secondary education and therefore take four years, while university Bachelor degrees would build on six years of secondary education and therefore take only three years. The binary nature of the Dutch HE system and its implications were thus clearly marked as "not for discussion" from the very beginning. Another early fixing made by the Ministry in the "declaration of proceedings" to the Bologna declaration was the call for "better coordination in the area of quality assurance" through "joint accreditation on a bilateral basis, in the long run preferably also in multinational co-operation". The Ministry thereby set the course not only for the Dutch path of curricular governance for the new degrees, but also for the European system as a whole.

As the major stakeholders had been consulted prior to signing the declaration, the act of signing in itself already confirmed that not only the Ministry but "the Dutch HE system", i.e., the representative organisations of universities and *hogescholen* as well as the two student organisations had in principle decided to move towards a Bachelor-Masters system. The Education Council also recommended signing the declaration (*Commissie Rinnooy Kan*, 2000: 4). Nevertheless, agreeing on the respective legal changes and working out the implementation details would take three more years.

7.3.2   Building a shared agenda: Towards an Amendment of the HE Act

This section traces the formation of consensus in the Dutch HE sector on the main features of the new degree structure and the introduction of an accreditation system that ultimately culminated in a major amendment of the National HE Act in 2002.

7.3.2.1 In-depth consultation: HOOP 2000

The advice of the Education Council was taken up in the 'draft HOOP 2000' (*Ontwerp*-HOOP, MOCenW, 1999b), published in September 1999 after stakeholder consultations on the government agenda (see section 7.3.1). The transition towards a Bachelor-Masters system was in fact one of its most important and discussed points, and the rationale given was that the international readability, recognition, and competitiveness of the Dutch HE system needed to be improved (MOCenW, 1999b: 54). In this document maintaining the binary structure of the Dutch HE system was also justified with reference to a range of other European HE systems with a similar structure, such as Austria, Germany, and Finland; and it was stressed that this was not in contradiction with the

transition to a two-cycle degree structure (ibid: 57). Moreover, as a "starting point of the discussion", the Bachelor level was defined as the regular exit point from *hogescholenl* and the Masters level as "first entry point to the labour market" for university education (ibid: 58). The Bachelor level at universities was, as in the advice by the Education Council, compared to the existing *kandidaat* level. The document opened the debate on the length of the Masters phase in Dutch universities. It sought to justify the relatively short length of Dutch university education in international comparison—four years up to the Masters level—with reference to the absence of international standards with respect to length within the European HE area (ibid: 59). To support its case it also delivered a specific interpretation of the Bologna declaration, namely that the international comparability of programmes was "not measured according to length, but according to the achieved qualification level" (ibid: 56). Nevertheless, the report opened two doors for further discussion in this regard: first, by referring to the precedent programmes in science and engineering which had recently achieved an increase of total length up to the Masters level to five years, based on a demonstration of international customs. Second, by hinting that a de-coupling of public programme funding and programme length was in principle possible (ibid: 59). The latter remark can be interpreted as a clear sign that from the Ministry's perspective, the debate on degree length was strongly conditioned by financial restrictions.

Regarding curricular governance, the draft HOOP set out the plans to introduce an accreditation system and argued why this was needed in spite of the fact that the Dutch HE system had a highly valued quality assurance system based on self-evaluation. What stands out is the perceived need for stronger international orientation in this area and the eager acceptance of international standards as benchmarks for Dutch degree programmes: "The international context forms the framework for the assessment of the quality of Dutch HE" (ibid: 83). While an excellent formative effect of the traditional Dutch peer review-based system was acknowledged, the documents expressed a political will to strengthen the external accountability of the sector through a more independent set-up of evaluation committees and the entire system of quality assurance, a stronger international orientation of standards, and international participants in the review teams. This coincided with the intention to bring the booming 'post-initial' Masters programmes under public control, first through the creation of a register and ultimately through public accreditation. Both intentions culminated in the idea that accreditation could solve the problem:

> The vision is that external quality assessment will lead to the granting of a formal quality label in the form of accreditation. For regular degree programmes this will be tied to admission to the CROHO, the entitlement to public funding (…) and the entitlement for students to student funding (ibid: 89).

The draft HOOP also reflected the HE minister's strong engagement for abandoning the check of macro-efficiency by the ACO as a condition for CROHO registration a central part of his deregulation agenda (ibid: 40). The HE minister's idea was that HEIs should be able to independently decide whether a programme was needed from a macro-economic point of view based on market research and voluntary co-ordination. Only the quality of programmes should continue to be subject to external control.

Formal consultation on the draft HOOP 2000 took place between September 1999 and January 2000 and included feedback-rounds with the representative organisations of universities and *hogescholen*, students, and employers. The Education Council gave formal advice regarding the future accreditation system (*Onderwijsraad*, 1999a), and the Lower House submitted 296 written questions on the HOOP, which were used by the HE minister to explain and adjust his plans. The discussions, extensively documented in the final plan (MOCenW, 2000b), helped to work out the points of dispute and consensus, and sharpen ideas.

Among the key issues were (1) the future of the binary system, (2) the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase and the nature of the university Bachelor, and (3) the future system of curricular governance. These shall be dealt with in turn.

THE FUTURE OF THE BINARY SYSTEM. Several parliamentarians questioned whether the maintenance of a binary HE system was compatible with the transition to the Bachelor-Masters structure as well as the overall aims of differentiation and enhanced flexibility. The HE minister insisted that "the distinction between 'higher professional' and 'academic' education"[176] was "an important form of differentiation that matches the prior education of students as well as labour market needs" (ibid: 21). He defended this position by stressing that the Bologna process was not about the harmonisation of European HE, but about improving the comparability of existing systems (ibid: 58). However, he did admit that if the binary systems became less common in Europe, the Dutch might rethink their position (ibid: 48). What the HE minister intended—and was supported by the VSNU in—was to ease cooperation and even the merger of boards of universities and *hogescholen* to improve permeability between the sectors (ibid: 105).[177] The Education Council also strongly supported the maintenance of a binary system (ibid: 175) based on similar arguments. The same held for employer

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[176] Throughout the text, 'academic' and 'higher professional education' are used as translation of the Dutch terms '*wo*' and '*hbo*' – traditionally, these terms were used in the Netherlands to refer both to the institutions (universities and *hogescholen*) and the type of education they offered. The translation 'academic' versus 'professional' would not do justice to the Dutch connotations as it was generally understood that universities also offered 'professional' programmes, but these were based on an academic background and therefore different from '*hbo*'.

[177] This proposal was not followed up in the 2002 amendment of the HE Act, but was taken up again in the 2005 initiative for a complete overhaul of the HE Act.

organisations, who were supportive of the transition to Bachelor and Masters under the condition that two different types of HE programmes were maintained and neither *hogeschool* nor university degrees were shortened under the new system (ibid: 138). The VSNU insisted that the right to grant Masters degrees should remain confined to universities (ibid: 109). The HBO-*raad* articulated its hopes of a softening of the binary system very cautiously, hinting that there were many open questions and that international developments should be taken into account when answering them (ibid: 111). The only open critique came from one of the student organisations, the LSVb, who asked how the recognition of the Dutch HE system was to be improved if the current system was maintained and "only a different name is given to it". They criticised that "only the impression is evoked that there is unity between European systems" (LSVb, 1999: 27). They also criticised that given the maintenance of the binary system, the Bachelor degrees of *hogescholen* and universities would only be formally equivalent, and that the function and status of the two would remain very different (ibid: 28).

TRANSITION FROM BACHELOR TO MASTERS. Another issue that emerged early on as one of the focal points of the debate was the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase. The VSNU voiced the concern that not enough university students might continue to the Masters phase (ibid: 110) and stressed that they considered a Bachelor programme primarily targeted at immediate transition to the Masters phase fully compatible with the Bologna declaration (ibid: 105). Both student organisations expressed their support for the Bachelor-Masters structure under the condition that student funding remained untouched and that the Bachelor degree was not conceived as an exit point from HE (ibid: 129). Employers also had no interest in university students entering the labour market with a Bachelor degree. In spite of this general rejection of 'professionalising' the Bachelor programme vis-à-vis the Lower House, the HE minister chose an open formulation; namely that it was "the choice of the student him-/herself to enter the labour market with a *kandidaat* exam" (ibid: 59) (At that time, the terms "Bachelor" and "*kandidaats*" were still often used interchangeably).

INTRODUCTION OF ACCREDITATION. In the course of the consultations of the HOOP 2000 the idea of an "accreditation body" had emerged, and it was discussed whether there should be one common or two separate bodies for the university and the *hogeschool* sectors. While the HE minister was open to a common system, he had no intention to impose it against the will of the VSNU (ibid: 114), which voiced its opposition to such plans early on (ibid: 107). In this early phase, it was still undecided whether this accreditation body would be an international organisation or a national organisation seeking international recognition, but VSNU and the HBO-*raad* as well as student organisations expressed their preference for a national system. In its advice on the HOOP 2000, the Education Council sketched important features of the future accreditation system that should actually be realised, including that the accreditation body should be independent from both government and HEIs, that it should build as

much as possible on information generated in the existing peer-review system, that it should provide a "quality label", that the accreditation decision should be the precondition for CROHO registration and the granting of publicly protected degree titles but independent from the decision upon public funding, and that the inspection might assume an "extra meta task" in the new system (ibid: 181-186). While the VSNU wanted to keep the 'post-initial' Masters programmes out of the accreditation system, the HBO-*raad* wanted to include them as soon as possible (ibid: 111); recognition of their Masters degrees under Dutch law was actually one of their prime interests in this reform.

Taking these views into account, the HE minister first presented his detailed ideas on the future accreditation system in a comprehensive manner to the Parliament in December 1999 (*Tweede Kamer*, 1999: 7-11). He stressed that the agencies carrying out the actual accreditation would have to be independent from both the HEIs and the state, which implied that the existing evaluation departments of the VSNU and HBO-*raad* would become independent organisations (later indeed resulting in the QANU and NQA, respectively). He also formulated his vision to admit additional accreditation agencies, especially international ones (ibid: 7). (At that time, it was still unclear whether these would operate within or alongside the Dutch accreditation system.) Moreover, his idea was that accreditation should become a precondition for the right to award degrees under Dutch law (ibid: 8). While the HE minister was clear about his preference for diversity in the future accreditation system, the question was still open to how the agencies 'on the ground' and the overall supervision of the system would work together. At the time, Hermans still considered the idea that there might be several agencies granting the actual accreditation under the supervision of the Education Inspectorate (ibid: 9-11).

The HE minister's aim to abandon the ACO test found the principal support of HEIs and employer organisations, but the difficulties with a practical alternative became very clear early on. Based on consultation with the sector, the HE minister proposed that HEIs should assume responsibility for "market analysis" when planning new courses, and that the new accreditation body should be given a control function in this regard (MOCenW, 2000b: 10,88,109).

Parallel to the policy formulation process, Dutch universities were quickly pushing ahead in introducing Bachelor and Masters degrees. According to a NUFFIC survey of autumn 1999, the majority of Dutch universities at that time were busy discussing and preparing the introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure, and four universities had already made the decision to convert their entire programme supply (Bremer, 1999). In doing so, HEIs naturally created facts regarding different aspects still under discussion in the policy formulation process such as degree titles, the conception of the Bachelor degree, and the selectivity of Masters programmes (Van der Wende, 2000). Triggered by student concerns with these uncontrolled developments, in May 2000 the HE minister

advised universities to remain within the limits of the current legal basis and wait for the envisaged legal change (MOCenW, 2000a).

7.3.2.2 Influential expert advice: the Rinnooy Kan Commission

The HOOP 2000 had also recommended that an expert commission be set up by the Education Council to advise on the design of the Bachelor-Masters structure in the Netherlands. Given the far-reaching nature of the intended change, it was felt that this commission would need particularly high legitimacy and should therefore draw on members from a wide range of backgrounds even though appointment would be "*à titre personnel*". The commission was set up in May 2000 and chaired by an influential private sector manager, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Rotterdam and former Chairman of the VNO-NCW, Dr. Rinnooy Kan. It included members from the Education Council, the KNAW, a former HE minister, students, and several professors with high public standing (among them two of the authors of the 1995 report "HE in phases").[178] Originally, it was planned that the commission should encompass international experts as well; instead, they were eventually only consulted through written procedures.[179] It pulled together a multitude of discussion strands, considering position statements from the representative organisations of employers, students, and HEIs. Only two months after its constitution in July 2000, the commission's advice "Introduction of the Bachelor-Masters system into HE" (Commissie Rinnooy Kan, 2000) was published by the Education Council. Its recommendations—although in some respects sharply criticised by the student union LSVb (2000)—generally reflected a broad consensus and were accordingly influential. As will become clear later, most were actually already implemented by the institutions.

The commission built on the preceding discussions in that it no longer questioned whether the Netherlands should move to a two-cycle system, but proceeded immediately to the question of what the future system should look like. The final report also stated clearly that it did "not see it as its task to initiate a discussion on the binary system" (Commissie Rinnooy Kan, 2000: 1). This was actually criticised by the LSVb which called the advice "a copy of the current system, pressed into a model of two cycles" (LSVb, 2000: 4). The LSVb held that putting into question the binary system would have been a logical consequence of the reform and criticised the commission for having complied with political considerations (ibid: 2).

Picking up on the government agenda for the HOOP 2000 and the corresponding advice of the Social-Economic Council (SER), the report highlighted the shortage of HE graduates on the Dutch labour market as the main

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[178] The secretary was Prof.dr. Marijk van der Wende from CHEPS.

[179] The commission consulted one expert each from the UK (Lord Dearing), Belgium, and Germany (Prof. Dr. Erichsen, then President of the *Akkreditierungsrat*).

rationale for the introduction of the Bachelor-Masters system, and argued that this would contribute to solving the problem by allowing for more flexibility of individual learning paths and supporting life-long learning (ibid: 3). The "employability" aim in the Bologna declaration was also interpreted in this light (ibid: 7).

Regarding the international rationale for the transition towards a Bachelor-Masters structure, the advice largely repeated the arguments from the earlier paper of the Education Council 'HE in international context', but concern with the "international reputation and competitive position of Dutch HE" was now even more pronounced (ibid: 4). The transition towards tiered degree structures was regarded as an "opportunity to clarify the complex situation of programmes, levels and degrees that had arisen" (ibid: 7). At the same time, the report expressed the awareness that there was "no clear or homogenous Anglo-Saxon model of education that can serve as example" (ibid: 9).

While the commission proposed a new schedule of three phases: undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate—its recommendations were confined to the first two. Regarding the Bachelor phase at *hogescholen*, the commission recommended changing the existing *hogeschool* certificate after four years into a professional Bachelor degree with the implication that the *hogescholen* would become degree granting (ibid: 12). While this would remain the regular point for *hogeschool* graduates to enter the labour market, the commission strengthened the case for the university Bachelor as an intermediate degree (*tussendiploma*), building on the existing *kandidaat* phase. This recommendation reflected broad consensus in the sector, challenged only by the *hogescholen* who pointed out that it was not in line with the Bologna declaration which called for a labour-market relevant first degree (HBO-*raad*, 2000: 15).

The commission admitted that it was "not impossible" for university students to enter the labour market upon receipt of the Bachelor degree and that this did "not necessarily need to be regarded as a negative fact". It did however, clarify that it saw the continuation of studies as regular case, and that universities were expected to encourage students to do so; a position in line with the VNO-NCW (2000b). Nevertheless, the possibility that university Bachelor graduates might enter the labour market was used as an argument for broadening the Bachelor curriculum, with specialisation and disciplinary concentration at Masters level. This recommendation coincided with a widespread curricular reform movement in Dutch HE at the time, centring on the catchwords "broad Bachelor" (*brede Bachelor*), "academic formation" (*academische vorming*), and "the major-minor model". Experiments with such forms of HE had already begun independent of the transition to the Bachelor-Masters structure, which served as a reinforcing development. The example of University College Utrecht, modelled on US-American undergraduate education, was highly influential in this regard. These reform efforts towards broadening the undergraduate curriculum were also supported by employers. The respective curricular models did not find their way

into formal standards or accreditation criteria however; they remained a voluntary initiative from the HE sector. Regarding the propaedeutic exam following the first year of university education, the commission did not plead for its abolishment but recommended stressing its orientation function over the other two traditional functions: transfer and selection (ibid: 13-14).

The commission also recommended an adjustment of the HE funding model so that part of the funding would be tied to the number of Bachelor graduates; and also of student funding, so that students would not loose their entitlement upon graduation from the Bachelor programme. All these recommendations were later implemented.

Regarding the Masters phase, the commission recommended allowing *hogescholen* to grant Masters degrees, though only in exceptional cases would they receive public funding. Furthermore, the difference between 'academic' university Masters degrees and 'professional' *hogeschool* Masters degrees should be maintained. This proposal was meant to legalise the 'post-initial' Masters programmes in the *hogeschool* sector, taking into account the growing demand for professional further education Masters programmes from the private sector and the trend towards lifelong learning. At the same time, it balanced the interests of *hogescholen* (HBO-*raad*, 2000) and those of universities who had wanted to reserve the Masters title to themselves (VSNU, 2000).

The commission recommended that university Masters programmes should be funded according to the length of the traditional programme in the respective field; i.e., two years in science and engineering and one year in most other fields. It did however respond to the European trend towards a 3+2-model and various demands from the university sector to lengthen the Masters phase in the social sciences and humanities (VSNU, 2000) by making two proposals: First, to distinguish more professionally- and research-oriented Masters degrees at universities. The latter could then take two years without this necessarily implying additional public funding. The degree title envisaged for the research-oriented degrees was "Master of Philosophy". In the debate, the idea was also linked to a possible shortening of the ensuing doctoral phase from the traditional four to three years, but the commission made no recommendation in this regard as the KNAW was strongly opposed. Second, in exceptional cases funding could be provided for particular, more selective and demanding Masters programmes— a first articulation of an idea that was later discussed under the heading '*top* Masters' programmes (ibid: 14-15). The VSNU demand for full funding of two-year Masters programmes in the social sciences and humanities was thus not entirely taken up by the commission.

Regarding the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase, the recommendations were again different for the *hogeschool* and the university sector. In universities, where the Bachelor degree was regarded as an "intermediate degree", provisions should be made for every Bachelor graduate to have at least one possibility for consecutive Masters study without further entry

requirements other than passing the Bachelor degree. It was also envisaged that universities should be allowed to offer other, selective Masters programmes. This proposal reflected a compromise between the fierce opposition of students to any form of selection and the position of the Ministry and universities that admission could not be automatic. In continuation of current practice, *hogescholen* were however allowed to put up specific entry requirements regarding prior work experience for all of their Masters programmes. The commission articulated the expectation that permeability from the *hogeschool* to the university sector should and would increase with the introduction of the new degree structure, although it stressed that admission of *hogeschool* graduates to university Masters programmes could not be automatic or legally guaranteed. Finally, the commission saw the introduction of tiered degree structures as an opportunity for increased flexibility, life-long learning and national as well as international mobility (ibid: 17-18).

Both recommendations—with regard to the differential funding of *hogeschool* versus university Masters programmes and to the different conception of *hogeschool* versus university Bachelor degrees ("exit point" vs. "intermediate degree")—were sharply criticised by the LSVb for being unfair and inconsistent with the logic of a tiered degree structure (LSVb, 2000). Students also highlighted the contradiction they saw between the policy not to regard the Bachelor degree as an exit point from university and selection upon entry to the Masters level. They were concerned with arbitrariness and unfairness of selection, accepting only selection on the basis of "relevant prior knowledge" (ibid: 7-8).

With respect to degree titles, the commission recommended that the dualism of university and *hogeschool* degrees should be signalled by the degree titles, reserving the titles "B.A./M.A." and "BSc./MSc." as well as "M.Phil." and "Ph.D." for universities. *Hogescholen* should only be allowed to use the degree title "Bachelor" and "Master", followed by the respective professional domain. International examples like the French "*licence professionelle*" and the British "LL.M." or "B.Eng." were cited as justification for distinguishing 'higher professional' from 'academic' degrees. The commission also recommended that students should continue to have the option to use the "equivalent" Dutch degree title instead of the new "Anglo-Saxon" degree, i.e., "*doctorandus*" instead of "M.Sc.".

Regarding accreditation, the commission largely adopted the outcomes of the HOOP discussion and the previous advice of the Education Council, but also indicated certain directions: As a compromise between the university and *hogeschool* interests, it proposed to set up a single common accreditation body (as called for by the *hogescholen* (HBO-*raad*, 2000) and employers (VNO-NCW, 2000a)) but left open the possibility to introduce two separate accreditation councils for university and *hogeschool* programmes (as called for by the universities). Different from the HE minister's intentions, it pleaded to functionally separate the task of accreditation from the task of determining 'macro-efficiency'. Regarding accreditation criteria, the commission stressed the need for international

cooperation and called for the Ministry to refrain from a legal definition to allow for dynamic adjustments. Both regular and 'post-initial' programmes should come under one regime.

From an update of the NUFFIC survey from autumn 1999 (Bremer, 1999) carried out by CHEPS in April 2000 (Van der Wende, 2000), it became clear that six universities had decided in the meantime to convert their programme supply and that a great variety in implementation was taking shape. Concerned with the risk of confusion and lacking transparency in the transition phase, the commission therefore pleaded to fix a conversion date as soon as possible by which the terms of reference should be agreed. In this context, it made the pragmatic proposal to grant automatic accreditation to Bachelor and Masters programmes developed by conversion of existing CROHO-registered programmes for the number of years equivalent to the common accreditation period.

7.3.2.3 Sketching an accreditation system: Ministerial note 'Attention to quality'

Simultaneous with the Rinnooy Kan Commission, the Ministry published a white paper called "Attention to quality" (MOCenW, 2000d). It laid out in more detail the Ministry's policy plans on accreditation as a basis for the preparation of a draft bill and discussion with the Lower House. The paper responded to a demand of the Lower House for an elaboration of the plans on accreditation that had been attached to the passing of the HOOP 2000. Based on extensive consultation with representative organisations of HEIs and students, it reflected the consensus reached among them. Regarding the rationale for the introduction of accreditation, the document again stressed the need for a 'quality label' that would improve the international readability and recognition of Dutch degrees and lay the basis for closer international cooperation in the field. Such a label would strengthen the summative function of the quality assurance system; and—different from the traditional system—would be independent from HEIs as well as the state. Moreover, a negative judgement should have clear implications for the respective HEI.

For this purpose, a single, independent accreditation body should be set up which would grant the actual accreditation. In line with the recommendation of the Rinnooy Kan Commission, there would be two councils within that body — one for *hogescholen* and one for universities—each working according to their own criteria but under a common framework. This way the system was kept open for potential stronger integration in the future. Under this framework, a number of quality agencies would carry out the actual site visits (ibid: 5-6). This proposal of the Ministry represented a solution to two conflicts of interest: (1) between the Ministry's interest in diversity and competition and the sectors' fear of arbitrariness, and (2) between the HBO-*raad's* preference for a single versus the VSNU's preference for two separate accreditation councils for the two sectors.

The unit of accreditation should be individual degree programmes, and accreditation should become obligatory for publicly funded programmes. The accreditation body and the two councils should be installed by law and the council members appointed by the Ministry. Besides providing the quality label, it would be in charge of the accreditation framework, including standards and criteria. The overall costs of the accreditation body should be covered by the government and those for the individual accreditation procedures by the HEIs. As the new accreditation body—by granting the actual accreditation—would assume the role of meta-evaluation previously carried out by the Education Inspectorate, the latter would lose its traditional function and instead be charged with the supervision of the overall functioning of the system (ibid: 9). Just as in the inherited system, students should continue to participate in the peer-review site visits. 'Post-initial' Masters programmes from universities should not immediately come under the new accreditation regime, but should as a first step be registered (ibid: 7). International agencies would be allowed to operate within this framework, as well as grant their own accreditation outside of the Dutch system (ibid: 8), a position in line with employer demands (VNO-NCW, 2000a).

The Ministry proposed to distinguish the accreditation of programmes already running from the quality control of new programmes which existed only on paper so far (literally "check of new programmes", *toets nieuwe opleiding*). The latter was thus not referred to as accreditation. For the transition phase, the Ministry proposed to automatically grant "accredited status" to all Bachelor and Masters programmes created from existing programmes, valid for a period of five years maximum since the last site visit under the inherited evaluation system (ibid: 11-12). All these proposals were later implemented. Regarding 'macro-efficiency', the Ministry suggested that institutions should become responsible for carrying out a 'pre-test' according to an agreed format, which was to include market analysis. The accreditation councils should then also assume the final responsibility previously carried out by the ACO. This procedure was to become part of the new quality check of new programmes.

7.3.2.4 Sketching the new degree system: Ministerial note 'Towards open HE'

Four months later, in November 2000, the HE minister summarised his conclusions from the advice of the Rinnooy Kan Commission in the white paper "Towards open HE" (MOCenW, 2001c). It was his first step towards the concrete preparation of a bill on the transition towards a Bachelor-Masters structure, laying out in detail the government's intentions. The paper clearly bore Minister Herman's personal signature in that it stressed flexibility and student choice, openness, and life-long learning as the overarching aims of the reform. He adopted most recommendations of the commission, and specified a number of open issues.

Regarding institutional types, he again confirmed that the binary system should be maintained and argued why (ibid: 4). However, he criticised that the Rinnooy Kan Commission had defined the "applied character" of *hogeschool* programmes as the main criterion that distinguished them from university programmes. Instead, he pointed out that many programmes traditionally taught at universities—such as law, medicine and engineering—were of an applied nature as well (ibid: 5-6). One novelty was the announcement of the Ministry's intention to increase diversification of the HE system by financially supporting the development of "top programmes" i.e., selective programmes of especially high quality and level. The HE minister referred to the image of an "elevated plain with peaks" to illustrate his vision (ibid: 7).

Concerning degree structures, he did not accept the argument brought forward by the university sector that the broadening of the Bachelor would necessitate a general lengthening of Masters programmes but conceded that in some cases, increased length might be justified in international comparison, citing research programmes as an example (ibid: 7-8). Concerned with the overregulation of degree titles, he argued that only the titles "B.A./M.A." and "B.Sc./M.Sc." should be reserved for university programmes and that there was no need for a separate "M.Phil." degree. As for *hogeschool* degrees, he advised against legally fixing a closed list of subject accretions and called upon the sector to come up with a list of possibilities (such as "Bachelor of Education") (ibid: 14).

The HE minister highlighted three different curricular options for the Bachelor phase with respect to curricula: the "broad Bachelor", the "major-minor" model, and the inherited disciplinary orientation; pleading for institutional freedom and variety. While he wanted to maintain the functions of the propaedeutic exam in terms of orientation and selection, he did not want to make it compulsory for universities to keep the exam itself (ibid: 5-6).

Concerning curricular governance, the paper included one important novelty, compared to the previous note "Attention to quality". The HE minister now argued for a decoupling of the nature of programmes from their institution i.e., within two years time *hogescholen* should be allowed to submit 'academic' programmes for accreditation and universities 'higher professional' programmes (ibid: 9).

Regarding admissions to the Masters level, the HE minister significantly refined the advice of the Rinnooy Kan Commission, distinguishing between different types of students and programmes. He recommended that for students from a particular HEI, "the entry requirements of the Masters programme should function as the benchmark for the learning outcomes of the Bachelor programme" i.e., the institution itself should take care that students who passed their Bachelor programmes would qualify for the respective Masters degree. For students from other Dutch HEIs the entry requirements should not be any different, but the HEI would have to check whether applicants fulfilled them as the Bachelor programme might not match fully. For international students and those with

work experience, admission would take place on a more individual basis. Apart from that, selection could be introduced for particular programmes, either in the case of capacity constraints or for "top Masters" programmes. The HE minister stressed however, that the introduction of selection at Masters level was not meant to lead to an overall lowering of the number of Masters graduates, to the contrary. The HE minister also recommended agreements between individual universities and between universities and *hogescholen* to ensure smooth transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase (ibid: 12). Different from the recommendations of Rinnooy Kan, the minister wanted to keep the direct access to Doctorate programmes for *hogeschool* graduates.

Concerning the transition to work, the HE minister stressed that the introduction of the Bachelor-Masters structure was about increasing student choice. Therefore, in addition to continuing their studies at the same, another Dutch, or a foreign university; entering the labour market upon the Bachelor degree should be a realistic option for university students even if the focus of programmes remained on "academic formation". The HE minister was thus markedly more positive towards university Bachelor graduates entering the labour market than the Rinnooy Kan Commission.

The ministerial paper considered the funding implications of the transition towards Bachelor and Masters in much more detail than had been the case in the Rinnooy Kan report, regarding both institutional and student funding. His intention was to alleviate any obstacles or disincentives stemming from unadjusted funding arrangements. For student funding, this meant that he intended to introduce the option for students to convert their basic student loan into a grant upon completion of the Bachelor degree. Regarding the funding of universities, the HE minister intended to include the number of Bachelor degrees as an indicator for the teaching allocation; aiming at a neutral change of the budgeting system. He did not intend to fund the new *hogeschool* Masters programmes. The HE minister did hint that, in the longer run the transition towards the Bachelor-Masters structure would trigger a more fundamental reform of the funding of the Masters phase with respect to increased differentiation and student choice, and announced that he would commission a working group on this issue (ibid: 14-16).[180]

Regarding the next concrete steps, the HE minister announced that he intended to insure that the necessary legal changes for the transition to the Bachelor-Masters structure, and possibly also the funding model, would become effective by the academic year 2002/03 (ibid: 17). From November 2000 to March 2001, this note was followed by another round of consultations, first with the

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[180] This indeed happened, and a whole range of advisory and discussion papers were published by different bodies in the years to come though this did not materialise in any concrete legal measures until autumn 2004.

various stakeholders (MOCenW, 2000c) and then with the Lower House (MOCenW, 2001b).

During these consultations, the HBO-*raad* appealed against the plan to reserve the degree titles "B.Sc./M.Sc." and "B.A./M.A." to universities, referring to a different practice in Anglo-Saxon countries. The HE minister defended his plans on the basis of "a broader European framework". He also argued that his medium-run plan to decouple the accreditation of a programme as either 'academic' or 'higher professional' from its institutional background partly accommodated the demands of the *hogescholen*. This plan—later referred to as "de-institutionalisation"—met the resistance of the VSNU, who insisted that an "academic programme" was unthinkable without the "academic embedding" that could only be provided by a university. Nevertheless, the HE minister decided to push ahead with the idea. He explained that he saw the introduction of the Bachelor-Masters structure "as the first step on the way towards a more open system of HE, which will be followed by further steps" (ibid: 2-3). In March 2001, the HBO-*raad* strengthened its case by submitting an international comparative study which concluded that reserving the degree titles "B.Sc./M.Sc." and "B.A./M.A." for university programmes was neither in line with Anglo-Saxon nor with European practice, where the accretions "of Science" and "of Arts were rather used to distinguish programmes in the humanities and social sciences from programmes in science and engineering (HBO-*raad*, 2001c).

The Minister's idea of "top Masters" programmes caused intensive debate in the sector. While his intention to differentiate the Masters phase found broad support, both universities and employers stressed that this would have to be the result of competition, not of a government definition of certain programmes as "top" programmes (MOCenW, 2000c: 4). Student organisations remained very critical of selection upon the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase, repeating that it should be only be based on reasons of "content" such as the relevance of the prior Bachelor degree, as opposed to criteria such as grades achieved.

Although the HBO-*raad* complained about the "unfair competition" caused be the asymmetric public funding of Masters programmes in the *hogescholen* versus the university sector, the HE minister did not change his position that this arrangement was justified on grounds that the Masters phase in universities belonged to 'initial' HE, while *hogeschool* Masters programmes were further education (ibid: 5). Nevertheless, upon demand from the Lower House, he commissioned a study to clarify the supply and demand conditions of *hogeschool* Masters programmes with a view to exploring their "social relevance" (Hobéon, 2001).

Finally, the HE minister signalled his readiness to provide universities with additional funding for the transition phase based on a specification of costs by the sector (ibid: 6); this was actually implemented. According to the Government's Spring Policy Paper *(Voorjaarsnota)* 2001, the universities received an additional 100 million Guilders, distributed over the years 2001 and 2002.

7.3.2.5 Changes in the funding regime

Besides intense debate on the regulatory framework for the two-cycle system, 2000 also brought important changes of the institutional and student funding system. Both were made independently of the introduction of the new degree structure, but are important conditions for understanding later adjustments.
From 2000, the performance-orientation of Dutch university funding was strengthened by the move to the so-called "performance-based funding model" (PBM). According to this model, 37% of the teaching allocation to each university was fixed on a historical basis, 50% was allocated according to the number of degrees awarded (at that time still the traditional ones), and 13% on the basis of the number of new students enrolled. The model included three levels of funding: a) low (social sciences and humanities), b) high (engineering and sciences) and c) medical studies.

The time limit to complete a degree and still be eligible for converting the initial student loan into a grant was relaxed from the stipulated duration of a programme plus two years (in total 6 or 7 years) to a standard maximum period of ten years for all students. This did not imply an extension of the actual period a student would get financial support, but just meant that the same support could now be spread over a maximum period of 10 years. The change tried to account for students' increasing involvement in part-time work and activism in addition to their studies (*Wet Studiefinanciering*, 2000).

7.3.2.6 Moving forward with accreditation: the Franssen Commission

In November 2000, concurrent with the publication of his ministerial note, the HE minister already commissioned a group of experts to work out the implementation details of the accreditation system with particular reference to the modalities of the national accreditation organisation and the two councils, their members, staffing and funding, as well as the accreditation criteria. The Commission "Accreditation of HE", also 'Franssen Commission', again drew heavily on stakeholder input when formulating their recommendations. The results were published in September 2001 (*Commissie Accreditatie Hoger Onderwijs*, 2001) under the heading "Setting incentives, achieving, distinguishing: Final report", and included the following recommendations:

The new national accreditation body (*Nationaal Accreditatie Orgaan*, NAO)[181] should be independent, but base its judgements on the results from the site visits carried out by the existing agencies from the inherited peer-review system (who would now work independently from the VSNU and HBO-*raad*), as well as by other agencies including international ones, who would work under a registration framework provided by the NAO. The draft framework proposed for this by the commission was modelled on the German example, but with one important difference: the final accreditation decision would not be taken by the agencies, but by the NAO. The agencies were to perform an important dual function: in addition to their inherited formative evaluation role vis-à-vis the HEIs, they would send a summative report to the NAO as a basis for its decision. Accreditation would be programme-specific, only judge basic quality, and refrain from anything like a ranking. It should however provide detailed information, also on special features of certain programmes. A judgement would be reached using a multi-dimensional grading scale.

Different from the HE minister's intention to give more leeway to the NAO, the commission insisted that the accreditation criteria and any amendments must be democratically legitimised through a process such as the HOOP for example (ibid: 18). It also stressed that the same criteria and rigidity should be applied to the accreditation of existing, and the quality check of new programmes. Contrary to the HE minister, it maintained that the HE minister himself, not the NAO, should assume responsibility for the assessment of 'macro-efficiency', which should be kept functionally different from the tasks of quality control. It also opposed the HE minister's idea of granting 'automatic' accreditation to Bachelor and Masters degrees created from existing programmes on the basis that this might damage the reputation of the Dutch HE system. To deal with the problem of scale, these programmes would be exempted from accreditation until 2008.

As for the future of the binary system, the commission followed the lines set by the HE minister: There would be separate accreditation frameworks for university and *hogeschool* programmes, but both institutional types could in principle submit both types of programmes. This compromise was referred to as 'de-institutionalisation' (ibid: 2). In practice however, the frameworks put forward by the NAO made it almost impossible for a *hogeschool* to fulfil the criteria for a university programme (ibid: 28). This began with the student intake which would have to fulfil the entry requirements for universities up to the different personnel structure which made it very difficult for them to provide the requested "academic context". The commission advised against subject-specific criteria, but the generic criteria it developed (for example for university Bachelor programmes), were already seen as too rigid by the sector.

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[181] Later it would be called Dutch Accreditation Organisation (*Nederlandse Accreditatie Organisatie*), but the abbreviation remained unchanged.

The commission expected a volume of 600 to 1000 accreditation procedures per year based on an accreditation cycle of five years, assuming that all current *hogeschool* programmes would be converted to Bachelor programmes and all current university programmes to Masters programmes, and that universities would create one Bachelor per two Masters programmes plus an additional two "broad Bachelor" programmes per university. It recommended 20 staff and an annual budget of about seven Million Guilder (€3.18 million) for the NAO.

7.3.3   Debating and passing the 2002 Amendment of the HE Act

After advice from the Council of State—the highest advisory body in the country to which all new legislation has to be presented before being passed on to the Lower House—(*Raad van State*, 2001a, 2001b) and agreement of the Cabinet (MOCenW, 2001a), in September/October 2001 the HE minister proposed two draft bills to the Lower House. One bill was on accreditation, which required an amendment of the HE Act (*Tweede Kamer*, 2001b, 2001c), and the other was on the transition to the two-cycle degree structure, which required an amendment of the HE Act and of the study finance law 2000 (*Tweede Kamer*, 2001b, 2001c). More rounds of stakeholder consultation and discussions in the Lower House took place before the change of the HE Act (with respect to both issues) was accepted by the Lower House in February 2002 (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002b, 2002c). Following another round of critical questions from the Upper House's Permanent Commission for Science Policy and HE (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002d), the amendments were passed by the Upper House in June 2002 (*Staatsblad*, 2002a, 2002b). They became effective in August/September 2002, about a year after the publication of the draft bills.

   Although the change in law had been extensively prepared by stakeholder discussions, certain issues were again subject to fierce debate, and a number of changes were brought about by the Council of State, stakeholders, and the Lower House before the draft bill passed the Lower House in February 2002.

   One issue was the future of the binary system. The draft bill had limited both institutional and student funding for *hogeschool* Masters programmes to a closed list of existing "second phase" programmes (in teacher training, fine arts, and architecture)(*Tweede Kamer*, 2001b). The HBO-*raad* criticised the HE minister for the "premature" implementation of the aim to create an "open system" of HE, pointing out the inequalities in funding between the university and *hogeschool* sector (HBO-*raad*, 2001b). It also joined the two student organisations to support this claim (HBO-*raad*, ISO, & LSVb, 2001). While most regulations regarding this issue remained unchanged, the bill eventually passed by the Lower House left open the possibility that more *hogeschool* programmes might qualify for public funding in the future (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002b). This decision would later prove to be

a door-opener, and the first *hogeschool* Masters programmes in health care were soon added the list.

The conflict over the future of the binary system also crystallised around the question of degree titles. Convinced by the evidence provided by the HBO-*raad* that reserving the degree title accretions "of Science" and "of Arts" for universities could not be justified based on European or other international customs (HBO-*raad*, 2001c), the HE minister had actually omitted this plan from the draft law (*Tweede Kamer*, 2001a: 23-24). However, the VSNU insisted that the distinction should be prescribed as recommended by the Rinnooy Kan Commission and the Council of State (VSNU, 2002). Vis-à-vis the Lower House, the HE minister defended his view that the distinction could not be justified on international grounds (*Tweede Kamer*, 2002), but also admitted that "striving for national transparency" was "legitimate" and therefore left the ultimate decision to the Lower House (MOCenW, 2002: 3), which brought it back in.

Another issue of debate was the length of Masters programmes at universities. The Council of State stressed that the trend towards "broad Bachelor" programmes as well as European trends made it necessary to give universities the freedom to lengthen the Masters phase by one year in courses that had previously taken four (*Raad van State*, 2001b). The HE minister disagreed with this view on the grounds that the level of Masters programmes could be kept high through specialisation, that international comparison was based on quality, not length; and that the current system had been in place for 20 years (*Raad* van State, 2001b). According to the draft bill, the length of a Masters programme would thus be determined by the length of the inherited programme minus three years for the preceding Bachelor degree. Although the VSNU also reiterated its case for an extension of the Masters phase (Commissie Cohen, 2001; VSNU, 2002), the draft law passed the Lower House unchanged in this regard. The HE minister did make important concessions: he decided to use the introductory phase of the new system from 2002 to 2005 to continue the political discussion on the topic, and to deal with it in the context of accreditation. Specifically, he proposed to give the new accreditation body power to develop criteria for lengthening the Masters phase and decide it on a case-by-case basis (MOCenW, 2002: 11; *Raad van State*, 2001b: 12-13). He also proposed to provide student—though not necessarily institutional—funding for two-year research Masters programmes if their case was well argued on national and international grounds (*Tweede Kamer*, 2002: 2-3). This decision also proved to be an important "door opener". The advice of a commission which had been set up by the VSNU to assess the demand of several disciplinary organisations for an extension of their Masters programmes to two years was frequently referred to by the Ministry as a basis for this decision. This commission (named after its Chair, Mr. Cohen) had developed a classification of university Masters programmes into research programmes, programmes preparing for different functions in society and those preparing for teaching in secondary education, and had recommended a two-year length for both research

Masters programmes and those preparing for the teaching profession (*Commissie Cohen*, 2001).

The HE minister's initiative to increase the differentiation of degree programmes, particularly in the Masters phase ("top Masters" programmes), was substantially limited by the Lower House, which asked to first set up a commission to clarify the function and position of such programmes before proceeding (see 1.3.13) (MOCenW, 2002: 10-11). The HE minister's proposal to allow for the differentiation of student fees was completely deleted from the draft bill (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002d: 27-28). Regarding selection upon entry to the Masters level, students and parliamentarians brought about a cushioning of the proposed regulation to ensure that selection could not take place on grounds other than "knowledge, understanding and skills", a formulation meant to preclude any form of discrimination or selection on grades (MOCenW, 2002: 5-6). In spite of these restrictions, the HE minister maintained the idea of "top Masters" programmes (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002d). Another change from the draft bill to the version passed by the Lower House that came in upon demand of VSNU (2002) was the move to ECTS.

The discussions in the Upper House that followed the debates in the Lower House focused on a number of more fundamental issues, among them

(1) the future of the binary system: members of the Upper House voiced concerns that the envisaged measures might water down the binary system, lead to inconsistencies, and be unfair towards the *hogescholen*;

(2) the international dimension: others questioned whether other European countries were really reforming and if so, how to ensure that these reforms were coordinated; and whether the Dutch reforms were not too inward-looking;

(3) the reach of the reform: in particular whether measures would actually be sufficient to render the system "flexible, open and international" and foster lifelong learning; and finally

(4) critical questions regarding the labour-market relevance and legal significance of the university Bachelor.

The HE minister answered all these concerns satisfactorily and the bill was ultimately passed (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002d).

The changes of the HE ACT regarding the transition to the two-cycle degree structure finally became effective in September 2002. The 10 main regulations (*Staatsblad*, 2002a) were:

(1) From autumn 2002, the existing *hogeschool* programmes were automatically converted into four-year Bachelor programmes without any curricular changes imposed.

(2) Universities could divide their existing programmes into a three year Bachelor, leading into a certain number of Masters degrees, which was

limited to the number of specialisation tracks in the traditional programmes (Art. 17a.2.). New programmes in the old structure were precluded (Art. 17a.1.) but no deadline was set for transition of all traditional programmes into the new structure (although the possibility was opened in Art. 17.a.7. to set a deadline at a later point in time).

(3) The traditional programmes would be granted "accredited status" for a period of six years from the last evaluation. For additional Masters programmes, universities would have to undergo the accreditation process for new programmes. The same held for additional "broad Bachelor" programmes, which universities were free to set up (Art. 17a.2a.).

(4) The length of the university Masters degree became dependent on the length of the original programme; in most subject areas it was restricted to one year. There were a number of exceptions however: In teacher education for secondary schools, the sciences, dentistry, and other designated research-intensive areas, the regular length of the Masters programme was two years; in medicine and pharmacy three years. Moreover, it was decided that universities could always choose to offer longer Masters degrees if they were able to fund them independently (Art. 7.4a.).

(5) Programme length was counted in ECTS credits, not in years. With the transition to the new system, Dutch HEIs would have to switch from the inherited Dutch credit system to ECTS (Art. 7.4.).

(6) While universities would receive public funding for both Bachelor and Masters degrees, *hogescholen* would get their Masters degrees funded only if they could make a case to the Ministry that the programme was needed to fulfil the professional requirements in a certain area and that there was a societal need for those programmes (Art. 7.3a).

(7) Access to university Masters programmes would be selective, but criteria could only relate to "knowledge, understanding and skills that can be acquired upon completion of a Bachelor programme" (Art. 7.30a and b). Also, each university would have to make sure that successful completion of their own Bachelor programmes gave access to at least one Masters programme offered by their own or a partner institution, independent of the grade achieved (Art. 7.13., Art. 7.30a.). In order to smooth the transition, it was decided that universities could also give access to a Masters programme before the respective Bachelor degree had been completed (Art. 7.30a.1.). *Hogescholen* continued their practice of selecting students for their (post-initial) Masters programmes on their own criteria, often including a certain number of years of work experience.

(8) Both universities and hogescholen became degree granting. The degree titles "B.A./B.Sc." and "M.A./M.Sc." were reserved for university degrees. *Hogeschool* degree titles would consist of "Bachelor" or "Master" followed by

the field of study, such as "Bachelor of Education". Subject accretions were not regulated (Art. 7.10a.).

(9) In addition to these 'regular' degrees, it was decided that HEIs could offer 'post-initial' Masters programmes, also leading to the degree "Master of (professional area)".

(10) Students retained the option to use the traditional Dutch degree titles instead of the new Bachelor and Masters degrees (Art. 7.20).

To account for the new degree structure, the Student Finance Act was adjusted as follows: students could now ask for their initial loan to be converted into a grant after both the Bachelor and Masters degrees. Students who decided to do so upon receipt of the Bachelor degree would however lose their entitlement to a public grant for the Masters phase. Also, as the time limit for completion of both programmes remained unchanged, all support for the Master phase would be regarded as a loan if a student did not manage to complete the Masters degree within ten years after entering HE (Vossensteyn, 2005). The main flexibility increase was that students could now more freely spread their grant and loan entitlements over ten years, as they were able to take it up in monthly intervals. Another regulation that remained unchanged was that students were only entitled to student financial support if they started before the age of 30 and there were no further interruptions after that. So the degree to which the lifelong learning agenda was translated into funding regulations was limited.

Institutional funding was also adjusted to account for the transition to Bachelor and Masters though not regulated by law. Beginning in the financial year 2003, the 'performance-based funding model' was succeeded by the 'BaMa funding model', which included an adjusted teaching allocation. The degree-based component was now based on both Bachelor and Masters degrees, with two thirds of the previous allocation granted for each Bachelor and one third for each Masters degree (except for medical studies, where the relationship was 2:3) (Boezerooy, 2003; Jongbloed & Salerno, 2003). This implied that the Masters degrees in the 3+1-model were given slightly over-, and the Masters degrees in the 3+2-model slightly under-proportional funding compared to their actual length. The funding model for *hogescholen* remained unchanged, because they now were to award primarily Bachelor degrees; their few Masters programmes were funded according to separate regulations.

Concerning the new accreditation system, nine major stipulations were included in the Amendment of the HE Act (*Staatsblad*, 2002b):

(1) There would be a single national accreditation organisation, whose task it was to accredit programmes and to carry out a "quality check of new programmes". Following the consultations with the Council of State and the Lower House, and in line with student demands and the advice of the Education Council (ISO, 2001), international cooperation in developing the frameworks for both tasks was defined as one of its most important tasks

(Art. 5a.2). Soon, this would be translated very concretely into the cooperation with Flanders through a joint national quality assurance system, a plan that the previous HE minister had pursued from the very beginning and that he saw as the first step towards the development of European-wide accreditation co-operation.

(2) There would be separate accreditation frameworks for 'academic' and 'higher professional' programmes, but—different from earlier plans and different from the draft bill—no separate councils; a decision that was in line with the advice of the Franssen Commission and the preferences of the HBO-*raad* (2001a). The regulation also left open the possibility that *hogescholen* could in principle submit 'academic' programmes for accreditation and vice-versa (Art. 5a.8.1)—a long-run aim of the Ministry. Up until autumn 2004 however, there was no precedent for this.[182]

(3) Partially considering the advice of the Council of State, (amendments of) accreditation standards had to be approved by the HE minister following consultation of the Parliament (Art. 5a.8.5).

(4) In line with the advice of the Commission 'Accreditation of HE', the task to decide upon the 'macro-efficiency' of programmes would be assumed by the Ministry and thus would be functionally separate from that of the Accreditation Organisation. The strong role of the Ministry in this regard was different from the far-reaching increase of institutional responsibility that the HE minister had envisaged in this regard (*Raad* van State, 2001a), but reflected the majority view in Lower House. The decision on 'macro-efficiency' would take place after a programme had been accredited (*toets nieuwe opleiding,* "test new programme"), except for new *hogeschool* Masters programmes which first had to be authorised by the Ministry (Art. 5a.11).

(5) In principle, only accredited programmes were entitled to public funding and degrees could only be granted for accredited programmes. On the basis of its 'macro-efficiency', the HE minister could however decide to fund a programme that did not get accreditation (Art. 5a.12 and 15), as he was entitled to withdraw authorisation from an accredited programme (Art. 6.5). These amendments reflected the advice of the Council of State (*Raad van State*, 2001a).

(6) Accreditation had to be renewed every six years (Art. 5a.9), a period criticised by students for being too long (ISO, 2001). If a programme lost accredited status, the institution would have to ensure that students could complete their programme (Art. 5a.12). The discussions in the Lower House and

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[182] In December 2004, the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy submitted by the Hogeschool van Amsterdam got accredited as an 'academic' programme, but did not pass the check on 'macro-efficiency' by the Ministry.

student demands (ISO, 2001) also resulted a cushioning regulation where the institution would get two years' time to remedy the situation before it lost its rights to award the degree in question (Art 5a.12a).

(7) The Accreditation Organisation would have to make a decision within three months upon the request of the HEI (Art. 5a.9) and the accreditation report would have to be made public (Art. 5a.10).

(8) The Accreditation Organisation would publish an annual list of recognised independent agencies for carrying out the site visits (Art. 5a.8a.), but HEIs would be free to choose agencies not on the list. The regulation reflected a compromise between the HE minister's liberal ideas and the plead for regulation by the Commission 'Accreditation of HE', the HBO-*raad* (2001a), students (ISO, 2001) and the Lower House.

(9) The Education Inspectorate was assigned the task of supervising the accreditation body (Art. 14.b) and evaluating the implementation of the new degree structure by 2007. Moreover, it was commissioned by the Ministry to report annually on the implementation progress through the so-called *BaMa-Monitor*.

7.3.4 After the Amendment: immediate transition to the new degree structure

As HEIs had already been busy introducing Bachelor and Masters programmes and/or preparing the full transition to the new structure well before the adjustment of the HE Act (Bremer, 1999; Van der Wende, 2000; Van der Wende & Lub, 2001), nearly all of them were prepared for conversion by the academic year 2002/2003. A couple of universities had already converted some or all their programmes in 2000 and 2001. In fact, institutions had been pushing for a timely formulation of the legal adjustments and complained that it took too long (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2003: 70). The HE minister had therefore taken concrete steps to put the new system into practice even before the amendment had passed the Upper House (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002a).

According to the first monitoring report of the Education Inspectorate, more or less all *hogeschool* programmes and about 80% of the university programmes were translated into the new structure by the beginning of the academic year 2002/03 (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2003). As the conversion of *hogeschool* degrees was more or less a legal formality, the high rate is no surprise. The exceptions in the university sector concerned teacher training (also exempted from the transition, see Art. 17a.2b HE Act), medical studies, and some other programmes. Most universities opted for a phased introduction i.e., in the academic year 2002/03 only the new entrants could start in the new structure, which was built up successively. Not all universities had completed the development of the Masters programmes by the start of the academic year 2002/2003, as the first regular

Dutch Bachelor graduates were not expected before 2005, but by the beginning of the academic year 2004/2005 this should be the case (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2005).

Before the amendment of the HE Act became effective, the government changed from the social democrat-liberal coalition to a centre-right coalition. The *Cabinet Balkenende I* was made up of the Christian Democrats (*Christen Democratisch Appel*, CDA), the liberal VVD, and the right-wing *List Pim Fortyun*. The new Minister for Education, Culture and Science, Maria van der Hoeven, delegated HE policy to one of her two Secretaries of State—in the Netherlands, these can assume the function of deputy ministers. Anette Nijs remained in charge until June 2004, when she stepped down over a conflict with the HE minister and was replaced. Both her and her successor, Marc Rutte—from the same political party— continued the course set by the former Minister Loek Hermans with respect to Bachelor and Master degrees and accreditation, so that the change of leadership did not imply a redirection of policy.

The major part of policy formulation was however completed with the Amendment of the HE Act; what followed from autumn 2002 to 2004 can be characterised as fine-tuning. The political debate in these years can be grouped around three themes. First, there were frictions related to the transition; students criticised the insufficient information policy of institutions and the uncertainties implied by the reform (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2003), concerns shared by the Lower House (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003e). By 2004, these problems had largely been solved (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2005). Second was repairing a few reform mistakes and omissions, and third was readdressing the disputed issues that had remained unsolved but were still on the government agenda such as degree titles of *hogescholen* and universities, differentiation of fees and the creation of "top programmes", the permeability from the *hogeschool* to the university sector, the future funding of the Masters phase, and more generally, policies to support the move to an "open, flexible and international system". The annual *BaMa monitors* of the Education Inspectorate contributed to these efforts, highlighting bottlenecks in the transition phase and feeding them back into the policy process (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2003, 2004, 2005).

For the sake of analytical clarity and legibility, the following sections depart from the strict chronological sequence of events adhered to so far and instead follow several important developments between 2002 and 2004 that partly ran in parallel: the setup and development of the accreditation organisation, the work of the Commission 'Top Masters Programmes', another amendment of legislation regarding Bachelor and Masters, and the HOOP 2004.

7.3.5   Establishment of the Accreditation Organisation

Thanks to preparations made by the previous Minister prior to the passing of the Amendment of the HE Act, the Dutch Accreditation Organisation (NAO) could

be set up without further delay in August 2002. Its first and foremost task was to develop the separate accreditation frameworks for new and existing programmes and for university and *hogeschool* programmes, respectively (NAO, 2003). The NAO chose broad generic frameworks that would leave room for expert judgements and respect the initiative of HEIs in designing curricula (Brouwer, 2004). They became effective in May 2003 upon approval of the secretary of state. In April 2003, the NAO was also asked by the secretary of state to develop a framework for judging whether a university's plea for an extension of Masters programmes to two years was justified. Strong pressure within the sector towards an increase of the length of Masters programmes was thus channelled through the accreditation system, and the NAO *de facto* assumed a delegated role in policy formulation. It developed separate sets of criteria for research Masters programmes, international law and language, and culture studies (for these three types, the Ministry had generally accepted a case for two-years) and for all other Masters programmes (NVAO, 2003). For the latter, universities would have to demonstrate that one year was insufficient to fulfil both international academic standards *and* the requirements of the labour market. To qualify for a research Masters a programme would have to include a serious research training component and be based on solid research competence. The Ministry would usually fully fund the accredited two-year research Masters programmes. Finally, the NAO prepared the creation of a common accreditation system for the Netherlands and Flanders. In September 2003, the Netherlands and the Flemish Community of Belgium signed a bi-national treaty to create the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Agency (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie*, NVAO). It became effective in December 2004 after approval by the Lower and Upper Houses (*Staatsblad*, 2004).

Due to the 'automatic' accreditation granted to all Bachelor and Masters programmes created through conversion of existing programmes, very few 'classical' accreditation processes —i.e., accreditation of already existing programmes—actually took place in the early phase; until September 2004, the N(V)AO had received only 15 applications. Instead, the decision upon the creation of research Masters programmes became an unforeseen focus of its work. This was dealt with as a variant of the "quality check for new programmes". Up to September 2004, the N(V)AO had received applications for 110 research Masters programmes, 85 of which were accepted, and for 60 other new programmes, 26 of which were accepted (Interview Dittrich, 2004) according to the criteria for the "quality check for new programmes".

By autumn 2004, five 'visiting and judging agencies'—(*visiterende en beoordelende instanties*, VBIs) as they were now called—were registered by the NVAO: QANU and NQA, the followers of the departments for quality assurance of the VSNU and the HBO-*raad* (now independent agencies), the DVC, which had been funded to accredit *hogeschool* Masters programmes prior to the amendment of the HE Act, and *Certiked* and *Hobéon*, two private and for-profit certification

agencies. Up until summer 2005 two more private agencies would follow, among them a large international consultancy (*bekoo* and *det norske veritas*). The original idea to open up the accreditation system for (international) competition was slowly taking shape.

7.3.6   The loose ends revisited: ongoing policy formulation

While the course of the reform was set by the amendment of the National HE Act and implementation proceeded swiftly, several 'loose ends' still on the government agenda and not yet agreed upon, or emerging from implementation experience, were taken up in a next round of policy formulation.

7.3.6.1 Commission 'Top Masters programmes'

One of the disputed issues pushed by the previous HE minister since the HOOP 2002, and not settled in the 2002 legislation, was the question of increased differentiation of HE and the development of "top Masters" programmes. Following a demand from a member of the Lower House, the previous HE minister had commissioned an expert panel around a reputed medical researcher and former President of the KNAW; Professor Robert Reneman.[183] In October 2002, the commission presented its advice (*Commissie Reneman*, 2002), which differed from the expectations of the Ministry in several ways: first, it reiterated doubts about the viability of efforts to publicly "label" or "define" such programmes *ex ante*, and stressed that superior quality had to emerge as the result of competition. Second, it advised against a linkage between top quality and top-up fees—on the contrary, it recommended that the government funding models should be complemented by *incentives* for both institutions and students to engage in top programmes. As these recommendation were not in line with the aspirations of the Ministry, they did not have immediate policy consequences.

Nevertheless, the commission did follow the previous HE minister's call to propose a set of criteria by which superior quality of research Masters programmes could be identified in the accreditation process, and came up with the following points: (1) they should be linked to internationally recognised research groups which (2) should have a critical mass, (3) student guidance, as well as (4) outstanding quality of students, and (5) graduates should get access to internationally renowned doctorate programmes.

The report is also important in that it captures the debates about the curricular and structural consequences of the move to a two-cycle structure at the time. Picking up on the Cohen Commission's typology and modifying it, the Commission 'Top Masters programmes' recommended distinguishing three types

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[183]   The secretary was Dr. Jeroen Huisman from CHEPS.

of university Masters programmes: "research" (two years, M.Phil.), "professional" (one to three years, M.Ed., MD, DDS, RA) and the so-called "domain" Masters programmes (one year, M.Sc./M.A.), the latter a kind of residual category for those university programmes that could neither be classified as research training in the narrow sense nor as training for a specific profession (such as engineering, medicine, accountancy, psychotherapy, or teaching). The commission again strengthened the case for 'broad Bachelor' programmes and argued for the integration of the research Masters and the ensuing doctorate, possibly through graduate schools.

7.3.6.2 Rectification of the Amendment of the HE Act

In May 2003 the 'rectification law on the introduction of the Bachelor and Masters structure' was submitted to the Lower House (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003g). It had already been initiated in July 2002 before the amendment of the HE Act became effective (see 1.3.10). In October 2002 the Council of State had articulated its advice (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003a). This renewed amendment was initially meant to bring about a number of technical adjustments and remedy a few omissions of the 2002 reform. The most important were:

- First, to adjust the entry requirements for a number of juridical professions in the public service from the traditional degree title '*meester'* to the Masters degree. In response to the advice of the Council of State, the Secretary of State also announced a commission to explore the scope for a more profound adjustment of the entry requirements to the juridical profession to account for more flexible student paths, particularly for students who had done their Bachelor degree in law at a *hogeschool* (ibid);

- Second, to allow universities to use other degree titles besides the accretions 'of Science' and 'of Arts', for example 'LLM.' or 'M.Phil.' (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003c). This adaptation had actually been promised to the Upper House in the discussion of the legal changes in 2002 (*Eerste Kamer*, 2002d) (see also 1.3.10);

- Finally, to insert a paragraph on the abbreviations 'B.A./B.Sc.' and 'M.A./M.Sc.', which the 2002 amendment of the HE Act had forgotten to mention.

During the debates in the Lower House in 2003, the hope emerged that another more far-reaching aspect could be dealt with in the course of the rectification, namely to put an end to the unsolved conflict between VSNU and HBO-*raad* over degree titles. Since the 2002 amendment of the HE Act, the HBO-*raad* had continued to complain about the fact that the 'B.A./B.Sc.' and 'M.A./M.Sc.' degrees were reserved for university programmes, arguing that it put them at a severe disadvantage with respect to international student recruitment and was not in line with international customs. In the parliamentary debate, the conflict was conceptualised as "tension between the binary character of Dutch HE and international comparability" (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003b: 2-3). There was a strong wish

to solve this conflict concerning international customs or based on international co-operation (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003f), but the Lower House had to realise that the international scene was too diverse to allow for that. The Berlin conference did not fulfil the Dutch hopes in this regard neither (*Tweede Kamer*, 2003a, 2003d). In spring 2004, the State Secretary therefore asked the VSNU and HBO-*raad* to come to a common vision. As they could not agree (*Tweede Kamer*, 2004a), her successor decided in September 2004 to push ahead with the above-mentioned minor improvements of the current regulation, and keep the "big questions" open. In October 2004, the law was accepted by the Lower House (*Tweede Kamer*, 2004c), and in December 2004 by the Upper House. At the same time, the State Secretary announced that he would set up an international commission to advise on the problem of degree titles in the long run (*Tweede Kamer*, 2004b). This should happen in early 2005 (MOCenW, 2005a, 2005b), and the report was published in June 2005 (Report Committee Review Degrees, 2005).[184]

7.3.6.3 Differentiation and selection: HOOP 2004

In September 2004, a new national policy plan for HE for the period from 2004 to 2008 was passed (HOOP 2004). It reflected some of the 'loose ends' of the introduction of the two-cycle degree structure and the wider repercussions of the system change (MOCenW, 2003a, 2004a, 2004c). Issues such as differential fees, top programmes, and student selection were taken up again and linked to the pending plan to fundamentally reform the system of student funding in the Masters phase. In many ways, the HOOP 2004 thus built on the previous HE minister's policy legacy. The transition to the new degree structure was discussed as important, but not the only reason to pursue these plans. It was presented as part of a wider trend characterised by the quest for increased flexibility and student choice, international openness and competition, higher permeability between the *hogeschool* and the university sector, between HE and the labour market, and between the Netherlands and the rest of Europe. Despite the advice of the Commission 'Top Masters programmes', the plan to provide state funding for such earmarked programmes was back in (MOCenW, 2004a: 63). Following a

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[184] The report provided a different perspective on the deadlocked Dutch discussion by diagnosing that it was not the binary system itself, but the pronounced divide between research- versus professionally-oriented institutions and programmes that made the Dutch situation unique in international comparison. It therefore expressed support for any endeavours to bridge the gap between the sectors, for example by strengthening applied research in *hogescholen*. At the same time, the commission did not agree with the *hogescholens'* argument that, based on international comparison, they should generally be allowed to grant degrees with the accretions 'of Arts' and 'of Science' – arguing that, indeed, the academic underpinning was currently lacking in most *hogeschool* programmes, and that in other countries such as Austria, these accretions were also reserved for the university sector.

white paper from December 2003 on 'Stimulating talent' (MOCenW, 2003c),[185] the HOOP 2004 not only envisaged funding for experiments with student selection and fee differentiation for Bachelor and Masters programmes in the academic years 2004/5 and 2005/6, but already announced an initiative to amend the HE Act to mainstream such policies even before an evaluation of the experiments (ibid: 68-69).[186] The idea of "top programmes" was explicitly linked to the creation of "centres of excellence", meant to attract outstanding students from abroad. The continued call of institutions for a lengthening of the Masters phase was addressed through a funding plan for research Masters programmes. The willingness to make extra public resources available for this purpose was based on the concern that the Netherlands was facing a lack of young researchers, also compared internationally (ibid: 59). The outright aim of these changes was to diversify the programme supply, moving away from the strictly egalitarian traditions of Dutch HE. In line with the advice of the Commission "Principles for a new system of study funding", it was envisaged to adjust the system of student funding to support the differentiation of fees (ibid: 77-78).

7.4   Policy change until autumn 2004

7.4.1   Institutional types

The Dutch way of dealing with the fundamental tension between the inherited binary divide and the logic of the consecutive system was to basically leave the binary structure unchanged, but open the boundaries regarding two clearly circumscribed aspects. First, *hogescholen*, too, were allowed to offer Masters degrees under Dutch law, even though—as opposed to university Masters degrees—they were generally not publicly funded. Second, a unified accreditation system was introduced for both universities and *hogescholen*, albeit

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[185] The white paper referred to an inter-Ministerial report on the differentiation of student fees (*Werkgroup Collegegelddifferentiatie*, 2003), the results of the Commission 'Top Master Programmes' (*Commissie Reneman*, 2002) and the reports of the formative evaluation Commission "Decentral Admission" (*Begeleidingscommissie Decentrale Toelating*, 2003a, 2003b). In 1999, an amendment of the WHW had changed the entry regulations for numerus clausus programmes, replacing the weighted lottery system with a system which allowed institutions to select part of their intake based on their own criteria. The effect of this legal amendment at institutional level was accompanied by a Commission "Decentral Admission". In their reports, they pleaded to pursue further the direction of increased self-selection by institutions and students.

[186] These experiments were actually approved and implemented. In 2004/5 the Commission 'Stimulating talent', chaired by Mr Korthals, selected a number of proposals and a next round is under preparation in 2005/6.

with separate frameworks for 'academic' and 'higher professional' degrees. Both types of institutions could in principle submit both types of programmes to accreditation, but the criteria made it difficult for *hogescholen* to get 'academic' degrees accredited in practice. Until autumn 2004, the possibility was not used (See footnote 178 in section 7.3.3.). The tensions inherent in these partial adjustments are evident. —Besides, a number of other developments such as the creation of centres of competence and of lecturer positions at *hogescholen*, as well as sometimes very close co-operation between the universities and *hogescholen* contributed to convergence of the two institutional types.

The following issues remained subject to continued debate beyond autumn 2004: First, Dutch *hogescholen* continued to argue that the decision not to allow them to grant degree titles with the accretions "of Arts" and "of Science" led to confusion abroad as these were, according to them, internationally used to signal the field of study rather than the 'academic' orientation of studies. They also pointed out that universities had always offered professional degrees in many areas. The VSNU and employers on the other hand, were anxious to safeguard the state of the negotiations reached by autumn 2004.[187] Second, related to the increased permeability between the two sectors, it was still open whether the entry requirements for legal professions in the public service would be adjusted to allow for student mobility between the *hogeschool* and the university sectors, or whether the entire education up to the Masters degree had to be of the academic type. The Ministry dealt with both of these open issues by announcing to set up expert commissions.[188] Finally, the long-run implications of the 'de-institutionalisation' of accreditation criteria for the future delineations between universities and *hogescholen* were open; but it had certainly created a dynamics working in the direction of blurring boundaries.

7.4.2 Degree structure

By autumn 2004, the Dutch HE system had made the full transition to a two-cycle degree structure. 90% of degree programmes were of the new type (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2005). To achieve this, the traditional four-year *hogeschool* certificate was relabelled a Bachelor degree, leaving length and content unchanged, but formally rendering *hogescholen* 'degree granting' institutions. They were now also allowed to offer Masters degrees under Dutch law. The respective degrees were "Bachelor/Master of", followed by the denomination of the disciplinary field or professional area, which institutions were free to choose.

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[187] See footnote 184 in section 7.3.6.3 regarding what the report of the international 'Report Committee Review Degrees' concluded in this regard.

[188] The advice of the commission on professional requirements in law, the so-called Hoekstra Commission, was published in 2005.

In the university sector, the traditional four- to five-year programmes were divided into a three-year Bachelor degree ("Bachelor of Arts/of Science") and a one- to two-year Masters degree ("Master of Arts/of Science"). Other degree titles were precluded in autumn 2004 but a rectification law was under way to allow for more variety in university degree titles, such as LLM and MPhil, as well as to introduce the degree title abbreviations "B.A./B.Sc." and "M.A./M.Sc" which had been forgotten in the 2002 amendment (see 1.3.15). The total length of university programmes up to the Masters level remained unchanged (3+2 for sciences and engineering, 3+1 for most other programmes), except for research Masters programmes which now took two years (but were subject to the special accreditation procedure for new programmes). Additionally, universities could offer 'post-initial' Masters programmes in the further education field but they were not allowed to use the accretions 'of Arts' and 'of Science' for these. Moreover, only the degree titles 'Bachelor/Master of Arts/of Science' were protected by law, not the plain 'Bachelor' and 'Master' degrees. Students could continue to use the traditional Dutch degree titles, even for the new degrees. The only subject area that had not made the transition was medical studies.

The most important classification of the new degree types was the traditional distinction between university and *hogeschool* degrees, also expressed in the different degree titles. A further classification stemming from the inherited system was that of 'initial' and 'post-initial' Masters programmes, according to which *hogeschool* Masters degrees were normally regarded as 'post-initial' and all university Masters programmes that were created from the last year(s) of traditional programmes as 'initial'. 'Post-initial' university Masters programmes from before the transition continued to exist, but now with a legal basis. This classification was problematic however, as it was at odds with the logic of a tiered degree structure, according to which any further programme after a first degree is 'postgraduate'. The Dutch classification by contrast, presupposed that university Bachelor degrees were not meant to qualify for the labour market and therefore continued to see the ensuing Masters programmes as part of 'initial' education. As criticised by the Report Committee Review Degrees (2005), the distinction was largely driven by the logic of the funding system, according to which only 'initial' Masters programmes were publicly funded.

Within the university Bachelor programmes, traditional disciplinary courses were distinguished from so-called "broad" Bachelor programmes, sometimes offered in multidisciplinary undergraduate schools set up particularly for this purpose (e.g., at the universities of Utrecht and Maastricht). At the Masters level, the research Masters was a clearly distinct type based on separate accreditation criteria. It was characterised by intense research training and a length of two years. Other classifications of university Masters programmes such as those proposed by the Commissions Cohen ("societal" and "educational" Masters) and Reneman ("domain" and "professional" Masters) were less manifest, floating around as mere concepts in the debate. Yet another concept that played an

important role in the debate, but had not crystallised yet in terms of regulations and practice, was the 'top Masters'; the idea of highly-demanding and internationally attractive, selective graduate programmes.

7.4.3 Curricular governance

The Netherlands used the reform of degree structures to complement their inherited peer-review based evaluation system with an accreditation system that would provide a more 'external' quality label, predominantly meant to signal and guarantee a high minimum standard of quality vis-à-vis other countries, but also to complement the formative function of the traditional system by a summative 'yes/no' judgement. To do so, the existing system was not only complemented, but partly transformed. The existing departments for quality assurance of the VSNU and the HBO-*raad* that had carried out the site-visits under the traditional system became independent VBIs ('visiting and judging agencies') under the new system. Besides the traditional role of these VBIs in formative evaluation, they would now also send a summative report to the newly established National Accreditation Organisation (NVAO), a single body for the Netherlands and Flanders. Based on this report, the NVAO would decide whether accreditation was granted. Besides the two 'sectoral' VBIs, the market was opened for further agencies. By autumn 2004 a total of five agencies were on the NVAO's list; two more, including an international one, would follow by early 2005. The role of the Education Inspectorate changed as well; as its previous task of 'meta-evaluating' the peer-review system was now assumed by the NVAO, it was assigned the task of supervising the overall functioning of the accreditation system. This was a light-touch role which it fulfilled through a seat on the board of the NVAO and a number of monitoring reports. Its influence on HE thus decreased. The commission that had formerly been responsible for ensuring the 'macro-efficiency' of the Dutch programme supply (ACO) was abolished. Contrary to initial intentions of the Ministry however, its function—deciding on the relevance and efficiency of new programmes from a macro-perspective—was maintained and now assumed by the Ministry, a solution regarded as interim by the Ministry itself. The 'post-initial' Masters programmes had come under the quality regime and were accredited according to the same criteria as the other programmes. As the accreditation frameworks of the NVAO were broad, generic, and developed in close consultation with the sector, adaptations with respect to curricular governance were not expected to affect the curricular autonomy of HEIs. What was still open however, was the extent to which the strengthened accountability function of the new system might impede the traditional formative evaluation (i.e., improvement) function of the site-visit system—a possible unintended side effect (Interview *Onderwijsinspectie*, 2004; see also Scheele, 2004). Another open question was the effect of the newly created competition between VBIs on the

quality of programmes. Finally, the consistency and transparency of degree denominations in the central register of publicly recognised and funded programmes (CROHO) was an open issue, as the transition to Bachelor and Masters programmes seemed to have increased the diversity maybe not of programmes, but of denominations and degree specifications (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2003, 2004, 2005).

7.4.4 Curricula

In both the university and the *hogeschool* sector, the transition to the 'Bachelor-Masters structure' coincided with some curricular reform trends already ongoing. In the university sector these were the introduction of a major-minor system, broader curricula, and more attention to generic skills. In *hogescholen* these were the move to competence-based learning, and similar to the university sector, the introduction of a major-minor system and a broadening of curricula; but here this also implied concrete efforts to reduce the number of denominations in certain disciplinary or professional fields. These trends were taken up and echoed by the Ministry, but the reform was not used to enforce any curricular reforms in a top-down way, either by the Ministry or through the accreditation system.

The fact that the university Bachelor degree was not intended as an entry point to the labour market limited the scope of reforms immediately necessary when converting the programmes. Universities could, in principle, implement the reform as a more or less technical 'division' of existing programmes. In the *hogeschool* sector, no changes were needed at all in order to translate the programmes into the new system. But both types of institutions could also use the reform as an opportunity to bring about far-reaching curricular change, which a number of institutions certainly did. The immediate changes were more marked in the university sector, as the introduction of the Bachelor degree necessitated at least some minor adjustments of curricula—most institutions introduced a short Bachelor thesis, even if this was not compulsory. By 2004, two thirds of university programmes operated a major-minor system. A number of universities such as Maastricht and Utrecht introduced broad Bachelor degrees comparable to the US-American liberal arts model, and more are expected to follow in the near future. At *hogescholen*, the curricular changes were less immediate but some of these institutions started to develop particular 'transition profiles' for students that would strive for entry into a university Masters upon graduation, introducing a 'university minor' into their programmes. Contrary to expectations, only a few new Masters programmes were set up in the *hogeschool* sector up until autumn 2004 (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2005).

7.4.5 Access

From 1998 to 2004, the access regime of Dutch HE underwent certain changes; however only some of these were triggered by the transition to the two-cycle degree structure.

At the Bachelor level there was a general trend towards increased selectivity of access. HEIs could now generally set a certain secondary school profile (i.e., a particular combination of courses) as a requirement for enrolling in a particular programme. A legal amendment in 1999 changed the national access regime for *numerus clausus* programmes. Besides the weighted lottery system, certain contingents were set aside allowing the best students to apply to the HEIs of their choice, and HEIs to select part of their students according to their own criteria. Following positive evaluation of this change, by the academic year 2004/2005 public money for experiments with student selection (and differential fees) was made available at both the Bachelor and the Masters levels even in areas without capacity constraints in the context of the initiative 'unlimited talent'. A change of law to mainstream such policies was envisaged by 2006.

This movement coincided with the new possibilities for selection upon entry to the Masters phase created by the introduction of the new degree structure, and universities' keen interest in 'top Masters' programmes. Selectivity at universities was however restricted to a segment of programme supply: for the bulk of programmes the status quo was perpetuated in that universities had to guarantee entry to at least one suitable Masters programme for each of their own Bachelor graduates, irrespective of the grade achieved. In addition, they were allowed to offer selective, high-quality and highly-demanding, so-called 'top Masters' programmes. Until autumn 2004, the concrete scope for doing so—outside the framework of the above-mentioned experiments—was however limited as institutions were not allowed to charge differential fees. Moreover, the basis for selection was confined to "knowledge, understanding and skills", a formula which precluded selection based on grades alone or on formalities such as a "wrong" prior degree. In the *hogeschool* sector, all Masters programmes were selective, usually requiring a certain type and amount of work experience. This did not imply a change however, as the *hogeschool* Masters programmes that existed prior to the 2002 amendment of the HE Act—albeit not recognised under Dutch law—had been selective as well.

Overall, these developments represent a first step to deviate from the egalitarian tradition of Dutch HE (MOCenW, 2003c). A paradigm change that took place anyway gained extra momentum with the new possibilities and arguments for differentiation provided by the transition to two-cycle degree structure and the context of international competition.

7.4.6   Transition to employment

Although the need for lifelong learning and more permeable pathways between HE and the world of work were important driving forces for the Dutch reforms, they were not translated into concrete policies, and the relationship between HE and the employment system remained largely unchanged until autumn 2004. First, the newly introduced university Bachelor degree was not meant to qualify for the labour market. Nor was there political pressure on universities in this direction, or interest from universities themselves or employers. It was of course possible for Bachelor graduates from universities to enter the labour market, but as the first regular cohort was expected autumn 2005, it was not yet clear whether this will be the case. Second, the transition to Bachelor and Masters degrees had so far created little new dynamic on the supply side of the lifelong learning and further education market. Most universities had concentrated on the creation of so-called "transition Masters" programmes, which were the immediate translation of the final year(s) of the traditional programmes, and were supposed to be studied immediately upon receipt of the Bachelor degree. Conditions for *hogescholen* to offer Masters degrees as opportunities for lifelong learning did not become more attractive, as they would normally not receive public funding and were still not allowed to grant the desired degree titles "M.A." and "M.Sc." under Dutch law. Third, and partly due to the speedy transition to the new system, little consultation with employers had taken place on the design of the new programmes (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2005). Finally, the student funding system, though granting some flexibility, provided strong incentives to complete studies within a period of ten years total and before the age of 30, meaning that serious labour market experience between the first and the second degree was difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, the transition to the two-cycle degree structure had created some avenues for future change in this regard, and political plans for a reform of funding of the Masters phase also pointed in that direction.

7.4.7   Funding

Institutional as well as student funding underwent a number of changes from 1998 to 2004, both independent of and in relation to the transition to Bachelor and Masters degrees. In 2000, the performance-orientation of Dutch university funding was strengthened, with a significant part of the budget now distributed based on the number of graduates. In the 2002 legislation, this model was adjusted to account for both Bachelor and Masters graduates. Towards this end, the previous teaching allocation was divided more or less proportionally between the two phases. The mode of *hogeschool* funding for the Bachelor phase remained unchanged. With the following exceptions, these measures can be characterised as a "neutral" adjustment that simply prevented unintended disincentives for HEIs to make the transition.

Universities could now obtain funding for two-year Masters degrees in fields that previously only took four years up to that level—implying funding for an additional year; they either had to get them accredited as research Masters programmes, or demonstrate that the extended length was needed to fulfil the requirements of the labour market *and* international academic standards. By autumn 2004, more than 80 research Masters programmes had been created using the new possibilities. In special cases, *hogescholen* could also now obtain public funding for Masters programmes on the basis of macro-efficiency and societal need; a number of precedence cases in health and nursing had been created by autumn 2004.

The adjustment of student funding was neutral too, in that the existing facilities continued to be granted up to the Bachelor level for *hogeschool* and up to the Masters level for university students. University students were granted an extra possibility to change their loan into a grant upon receipt of the Bachelor degree, to give them a real option to enter the labour market if they wished. If they decided to do so, they did however lose the entitlement for public support in the Masters phase. Alternatively, they could keep the option to do a Masters degree and retain their rights as long as they completed their studies within ten years upon entering HE, took them up again before the age of 30, and did not interrupt them afterwards. Even if these regulations allowed for quite some flexibility at the students' side, the adjustment was incomplete: there remained tension between the government agenda of lifelong learning and the age limits attached to public support.

Beyond these immediate changes, the transition towards the two-cycle degree system triggered a reflection and debate about more far-reaching adjustments of the funding system for HE, including the creation of a unified funding model for university and *hogeschool* Bachelor programmes, a more demand-driven funding model for the Masters phase, also with a view of international mobility, and the introduction of differential student fees particularly for Masters programmes (Boezerooy, 2003; MOCenW, 2004a, 2004b).[189]

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[189] Additionally, since the end of 2004 far reaching plans to introduce a system of learning entitlements (vouchers) in *hogescholen* and universities were discussed (MOCenW, 2004b).

8 France

Like the other national cases, this chapter is structured into four parts: an initial section introducing the major actors in French HE policy and their capabilities, a section depicting the initial institutional setting in early 1998, a section tracing policy formulation on the reform of degree structures, and a final section recapitulating policy change until autumn 2004. Different from Germany and the Netherlands, the reform of degree structures in France was conceptualised from the beginning as encompassing three cycles. It was first referred to as '3 – 5 – 8' (referring to the number of years of full-time studies needed to complete each of these cycles, and later as LMD (*licence – master – doctorat*).[190] As France played a crucial role in the genesis of the Bologna process and the drive towards the reform of national degree structures in Europe, the linkages between the Sorbonne declaration (see chapter 5 on 'Europe') and the early phase of French policy formulation in 1998 receive particular attention.

8.1   Actors and their capabilities

In 1998, the principle responsibility for HE in France was held by the Ministry of National Education, Research and Technology (*Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de la recherche et de la technologie*, henceforth "the ministry" or "the ministry in charge of HE").[191] The university sector was directly under its control. The second major type of HEI in French HE, the *grandes écoles* (see section 8.2.1 on 'institutional types') however, largely fell under the responsibility of other public authorities such as the Ministry of Industry, Agriculture or others for the engineering schools (*écoles d'ingénieur*), and local chambers of industry and commerce for the business schools (*écoles de commerce*). Within the ministry in charge of HE, the HE Directorate (*direction de l'enseignement supérieur*, DES) was responsible for

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[190] Similar to the previous case studies, the new French *master* programmes introduced as part of this reform are generally referred to as Masters programmes in line with the more common English terminology unless specific degree titles are referred to.

[191] The name of the Ministry in charge of HE and the exact combination of departments varied with changes of ministers. From 1997 to 2004, four ministers in charge of HE held office: Claude Allègre (06/1997-04/2000) and Jack Lang (04/2000-05/2002) under the socialist government of Lionel Jospin, and Luc Ferry (05/2002-03/2004) and François Fillon (03/2004-06/2005) under the conservative government of Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Under Jack Lang, the name of the ministry was "Ministry of National Education" (*Ministère de l'éducation nationale*), under Luc Ferry, "Ministry of Youth, Education and Research" (*Ministère de la jeunesse, l'éducation nationale, et de la recherche),* and under François Fillon, "Ministry of National Education, HE and Research" (*Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*).

developing HE policies and supervising institutions. Depending on the distribution of portfolios, a deputy minister for particular fields was appointed[192] making the minister in charge of HE, the director of the DES, and the deputy minister for HE or research—if there was one—the key persons within the Ministry.[193] When speaking of "the ministry", I generally refer to either the DES or the ministry as a whole represented by the minister. In spite of a number of reforms geared at increasing the autonomy and steering capacity of French universities (Musselin, 2004), the HE system in 1998 was still characterised by a high degree of centralisation and strong state control. This was mirrored by the fact that political planning capacity was concentrated in the ministerial bureaucracy and the (changing) cabinets of education ministers, and there was no important role for permanent advisory bodies. There was a clear task distribution between the education minister and his cabinet setting strategic political lines and the DES in charge of administrative implementation and liaison with stakeholders; which is key to the understanding of the functioning of French HE policy making.

The National HE Act, which provided the overall framework for HE governance in France, had not been amended since the *loi Savary* in 1984. Because any attempt to do so caused fierce political resistance and the government was afraid of student protests, HE policy was largely made through decrees (*décrets* and *arrêtés*), and therefore without involvement of the parliament. Instead, the CNESER (*conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*), a corporatist council representing 61 delegates from a wide range of stakeholders in HE, assumed the function of an "HE parliament". Every policy had to be discussed in the CNESER before it was passed and even though this council did not have formal veto power, the Ministry usually tried to make sure that the majority of the CNESER was in favour of its policies. As CNESER minutes are not public, it is difficult to get an insight into what happened at this level. More important than the CNESER discussions however, were the informal consultations held by the Ministry during policy formulation. The extent to which this policy instrument was used depended on the political style of the respective minister, but it was customary for the DES to seek the consent of major stakeholders at an early stage. The involvement of the representative organisation of university vice-chancellors (*conférence des présidents d'université*, CPU) was traditionally particularly high.[194] While the ministry did at times push through policies against the resistance of other bodies, it would not normally do so without the consent of the CPU. The

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[192] In times without a deputy minister, the function was normally assumed by a special advisor.

[193] In the period 1997 to 2004, the director of the DES changed only once: in August 2002, Francine Demichel was followed by Jean-Marc Monteil. Deputy ministers for research only existed under Ferry and Fillon.

[194] The vice-chancellors of those *grandes écoles* which are supervised by the Ministry were also represented in the CPU.

CPU was formally presided by the minister—the vice-president being a university vice-chancellor—reflecting the traditionally high state proximity of the French university sector.

Other representative bodies of HEIs consulted by the ministry included the 'assembly of directors of the university institutes of technology' (*instituts universitaires de technologie*, IUTs) (*assemblée des directeurs des IUTs*, ADIUT) and the representative organisations of the *grandes écoles*. Indicative of the divide between the largest groups of institutions among the latter, they were represented by two separate organisations: The CGE (*Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*) represented the publicly-recognised *grandes écoles* of commerce, engineering, and other sectors; and the CDEFI (*conférence des directeurs d'écoles et formations d'ingénieurs*) represented only the engineering schools.[195]

The two most important student organisations were UNEF (*union nationale des étudiants de France*) and La FAGE (*fédération des associations générales étudiants*), with UNEF traditionally more left-wing and La FAGE more pragmatic in orientation. The PDE (*promotion et défense des étudiants*) also played a role. All were represented in the CNESER, and were official partners of the ministry, receiving public funding for full-time representative and administrative staff in their national offices. The UNEF traditionally had close links with the major union of academic staff in HE, SNESUP (*syndicat national de l'enseignement supérieur*), which had a strong involvement in HE policy and tended to be critical of government policy.

Employers represented by MEDEF (*mouvement des entreprises de France*), their biggest organisation, did not play a major role in this area despite the fact that they were also members of the CNESER and consulted by the ministry on employment-related aspects of HE reform. As the French system is characterised by the strong political presence of a large number of unions (*syndicats*) representing an extremely wide range of interest groups from parents to academic staff, the mentioned bodies can only be a selection of particularly influential ones.

8.2   Institutional setting in early 1998

8.2.1   Institutional types

The French HE system in 1998 was—and still is—characterised by a dichotomy between two types of HEIs: the 87 universities and the more than 1000 *grandes*

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[195] As some engineering schools formed part of universities (see "institutional diversity"), they were represented both indirectly through the CPU *and* directly through the CDEFI:

écoles.[196] Roughly speaking, the universities were under the supervision of the ministry in charge of HE, and tended to be research intensive,[197] non selective, and egalitarian in outlook; most *grandes écoles* were supervised by other national ministries,[198] regional chambers of commerce or had private status, and could be characterised as application-oriented, selective, and elitist in orientation. Still, there were several exceptions to this rule: some *grandes écoles*, such as the *écoles nationales supérieures* (ENS) and the *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques* (*Sciences Po)*, were under the supervision of the ministry in charge of HE and had the right to grant graduate degrees;[199] and 94 out of the 240 engineering schools were organised as part of universities. Some *grandes écoles* performed high-level research—sometimes in close cooperation with universities—while of course not all universities were equally research-intense. Similarly, universities had also developed links with industry and offered some explicitly professionally-oriented courses. And while all *grandes écoles* had the formal right to select students, in practice not all of them received sufficient applications to apply equally strict criteria. At the same time, some fields within the university sector had the right to select students. Due to these subtleties, it was common to informally differentiate institutions within the *grandes écoles* sector into "*grandes écoles*" and "*grandes grandes écoles*".

In spite of these qualifications, the *grandes écoles* in general had a higher status than universities according to the general public image, the main reason being their right to select students. Elites in the public and private sector were traditionally recruited from the *grandes écoles*. They worked with experienced and well-networked staff with a practical background who commonly did not hold formal training beyond the Masters level. The societal function of elite formation assumed by the *grandes écoles* was historically rooted in and legitimised by a widespread understanding that the achievements of the graduates of *grandes écoles* were based on merit, not on socio-economic status. The attribution of higher status to the application-oriented institutions is quite unusual in international comparison.

The largest groups of *grandes écoles* existed in business studies (214) and engineering (240). This division of tasks had historical reasons. With the universities traditionally focusing on sciences and humanities, the *grandes écoles*

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[196] Numbers of institutions in this chapter are from MEN (2001d: 43) and refer to the academic year 1998/99.

[197] …although this research intensity was structurally weakened by the fact that the bulk of public research funding went to the *Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), a decentrally-organised national research organisation. Its centres were often attached to universities however, and research and graduate education was organised in co-operation with the university sector.

[198] Some of the largest and most prestigious *grandes écoles* were under the authority of the Ministry of Industry.

[199] …that is, the doctorate and DEA/DESS (see section 8.2.1 on 'degree structure').

had been founded before and during the Revolution[200] to cater to specific technical needs of the state, so that professional training—particularly for the state service—became the domain of the *grandes écoles*. Nevertheless, some programmes such as law, medicine or theology, continued to be limited only to universities.

Universities as well as *grandes écoles* offered qualifications at level '*bac*+5', and all universities and some *grandes écoles* also offered doctoral degrees at level '*bac*+8'.[201] Permeability between the two systems was possible but limited: while entry into university studies would normally take place immediately upon completion of secondary education, entry into a *grande école* would normally require successful completion of a particular one- or two-year preparatory course. These programmes were not formally part of HE and were often attached to secondary schools (the 494 *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles*, CPGEs). Only the best of these graduates were selected by the better *grandes écoles* by means of a competitive exam (*concours)*. However, outstanding university students in relevant fields also had a chance to apply for admission to *grandes écoles* upon completion of the first *three* years of their education. The same held for the best graduates from the 101 university institutes of technology (*instituts universitaires de technologie*, IUTs), entities within the universities specialised in technical education up to level '*bac*+2'.

Another special feature of French HE was the nesting of institutions within— or attachment of institutions to—universities. In addition to the IUTs founded in 1966 as part of the effort to professionalise university education, the professional university institutes (*instituts universitaires professionalisés*, IUPs) had been created within universities in 1991, but with a lower degree of internal autonomy than the IUTs. They recruited at level '*bac*+1' and offered degrees up to level '*bac*+4'. Looser forms of attachment existed for the university-related engineering schools (*écoles d'ingénieurs)* and the 26 teacher training institutes (*instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres*, IUFM). These various arrangements led to a special mixture of institutional segregation and overlap: the institutionalisation of certain educational functions in separate units did not ease the coherent management of programme supply from an overall perspective.

Finally, the existence of a post-secondary sector that was not formally part of HE was another special trait of the French system. Besides the CPGEs, these also included special sections of higher technical education attached to secondary schools: the 1936 so-called *sections de techniciens supérieurs* (STSs). Both offered qualifications up to level '*bac*+2'.

The mostly public and multidisciplinary universities absorbed 67% (1.4 million) of the 2.1 million students in France in the academic year 1998/99

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[200] …. after the Convention suppressed the *corporatio universitaire* and the faculties…

[201] In France, qualification levels are usually described in terms of 'the secondary school leaving exam, *baccalauréat*, abbreviated as 'bac', + the number of years in HE'.

(including IUTs, IUPs, and the engineering schools that were part of universities), while the *grandes écoles* (including the CGPEs) only catered to 18% of students and the STS for another 11% (calculated from MEN, 2001d: 159).

8.2.2 Degree structure

The institutional fragmentation of the French HE system was further complicated by the degree structure; not only did each of the institutional types confer their own degrees,[202] but within several of the institutional types, tiered degree structures existed while in others they did not. In sum, this resulted in a highly fragmented multi-tiered system with a range of qualifications after nearly every year of studies.

In the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, the first two years of university studies led towards the *diplôme d'études universitaires générales* (DEUG).[203] Studies then continued with the *licence* after the third and the *maîtrise* after the fourth year. In the fifth year, the path was split into the professionally-oriented *diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées* (DESS) and the research-oriented *diplôme d'études approfondies* (DEA), which could prepare for a doctoral phase of another three or more years. In spite of the existence of qualifications after every year, the university degree system was generally thought of as a three-cycle structure with the first cycle ending at the DEUG or equivalent, the second cycle encompassing *licence* and *maîtrise*, and the third cycle leading to DESS or DEA as well as the doctorate, thus resulting in a 2+(1+1)+1-structure (+3 if the doctorate is included). The peculiarity of this system was the absence of a "clearly defined first degree" (Paul & Murdoch, 2000: 179). The system was instead characterised by "different layers of diplomas which follow each other without any explicit exit level" (ibid: 179). The DEUG, *licence* and *maîtrise* all could be described as general academic education, and in spite of the formal qualifications conferred by them, their actual labour-market relevance outside of the public sector was low (see section 8.2.6 on 'transition to employment'). The many other qualifications that had been created at all levels were to a large extent a response to this.

At level '*bac*+2', the IUTs offered an application-oriented technological qualification aimed at preparing students for immediate entry into the labour market; the *diplôme universitaire de technologie* (DUT)—although the majority of

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[202] In France, the common word for 'degree' is *diplôme,* but there is also the term *grade.* In the course of the French policy formulation on two-cycle degree structures, the (juridical) distinction between *grades* and *diplômes* became very important, but in 1998 it was not. As 'diploma', in the English-speaking context has a very different meaning from the French *diplôme*, the term 'degree' is used as an umbrella term for both *grades* and *diplômes*. Whenever the distinction is important in the text, the original French terms are used.

[203] The first examinations took place after one year and were referred to as DEUG I.

student actually continued their studies. Similarly, the two-year post-secondary technical training offered by the STS was not meant to qualify for further university studies (*brevet de technicien supérieur,* BTS). The DUT and BTS were the French standard qualifications for mid-level technicians. Universities had also created a professionally-oriented qualification in science and technology at this level, the DEUST (*diplôme d'études universitaires scientifiques et techniques*). At level '*bac*+3', there were few alternatives to the *licence*, but the IUPs offered a 'professionalised' *licence* and since 1995, the IUTs provided limited possibilities for a technical degree, the *diplôme national de technologie spécialisé* (DNTS), open to holders of a DUT or a BTS. At level '*bac*+4', the universities offered a range of explicitly 'professional' versions of the *maîtrise,* such as the MIAGE, MSG, MST, and the MSBM, which started after the DEUG[204]. The IUPs granted the *ingénieur-maître*, which was meant to provide an alternative to the engineering degrees conferred by the *grandes écoles*.

At level '*bac*+5', the DESS constituted the 'professionalised' alternative to the research-oriented DEA, which was also the precondition for doctoral studies. The *grandes écoles*, which had their intake mostly at level '*bac*+2',[205] led students in three years directly towards a diploma issued by the respective school at level '*bac*+5', such as the *diplôme d'ingénieur* in the field of engineering. The qualifications structure at *grandes écoles* could thus be described as '2+3', implying the formal convergence of the universities and *grandes écoles* at level '*bac*+5'. The model of the *grandes écoles* was followed by the *magistère*s created in the late 1980s as selective programmes of excellence in the university sector (CNE, 1995). In 1996, the *grandes écoles* began an initiative to offer 'Masters' degrees for international students as a 'cosmopolitan' alternative to the highly culture-specific '*diplôme d'ingénieur*' i.e., with a curriculum adjusted to the interests and abilities of foreign students. This initiative did not pass beyond the stage of insular pilot projects however.

More established were the so-called '*mastères specialisés'* (MS), which the *grandes écoles* offered since the 1980s to attract foreign students. These were usually one-year 'sandwich' programmes (six months in school, six in a firm). They were designed as level '*bac*+6' or '*post-diplôme'* i.e., on top of a traditional Masters-level degree such as the '*diplôme d'ingénieur*', and usually offered highly specialised training in particular professional fields. The MS was a 'quality label' provided and protected by the peak organisation of the *grandes écoles*, CGE. Another degree at level '*bac*+6' was the one certifying successful completion of the

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[204] MIAGE (maîtrise d'informatique appliquée à la gestion des entreprises), MSG (maîtrise de sciences de gestion), MST (maîtrise de sciences et techniques), MSBM (maîtrise de sciences biologiques et médicales).

[205] Some *grandes écoles* also recruited at level '*bac*+1' and some, like the INSA, taught integrated programmes of five years.

university part of medical education (*certificat de synthèse clinique et thérapeutique*, CSCT).[206]

The creation of new degrees mainly for 'professionalisation', but also for other innovative purposes such as internationalisation, thus contributed to the compartmentalisation and complexity of the French degree system already inherent in the institutional diversity.

With regard to degree types, a very important distinction in the French system was that between state vs. institutional degrees (*diplôme national* vs. *diplôme d'établissement*). The concept of the *diplôme national*—implying that the state guaranteed the quality of degrees—was deeply enshrined in the self-conception of French HE, and traditionally linked to nationally standardised curricula. The vast majority of programmes offered by public HEIs qualified as *diplôme national*; they existed in all fields, not only in areas of particular public interest such as law or medicine. In addition, institutions were free to offer their own degrees and enjoyed curricular autonomy regarding these, but in the university sector this remained a niche phenomenon. In the *grandes écoles* sector, institutional degrees were the norm, the only exception being the *diplôme d'ingénieur.*

8.2.3 Curricular governance

In France, all degree programmes under the supervision of the Ministry in charge of HE were traditionally 'accredited'[207] by the state, a process referred to as '*habilitation*'. Meant to guarantee a standardised national quality of degrees, the procedure was closely linked to the notion of the '*diplôme national'*. For some of these degrees—such as DEUG, *licence*, *maîtrise*—universities held a monopoly; no institution other than a university could deliver them.

Under the system of *habilitation*, all university programmes had to be submitted to the Ministry for re-accreditation every four years; until 1989 this was done by type of degree and by subject area, e.g., all *licence* programmes in the humanities were due in one year. The traditional method was to compare programmes submitted by institutions to a list of formal national subject-specific

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[206] Leading towards the *diplôme d'état de docteur en medicine* after completion of another 2 ½ years of practical training. In dentistry, the respective degree was granted after 5 years of studies. Veterinary medicine was taught at *grandes écoles* and also completed at level '*bac*+5'.

[207] The term 'accréditation' has a different meaning in France and is only used in relation to the *habilitation* of *magistère* programmes and graduate schools (*écoles doctorales*). The term '*accréditation*' was chosen for the *magistère* to signal "that the *magistère* shall escape the framework of the *diplôme national* in order to offer universities more freedom to organise them" (CNE, 1995: 15), but basically it shared the same notion of an official act of recognition by the Education Ministry. In this study, the term 'state accreditation' is used as an English translation for *habilitation*.

requirements, the '*maquette*'.[208] Of course there had always been variation between programmes, but this was limited. Since 1989, the *habilitation* was performed in the context of a system of management by contracts, by which the performance of each institution was evaluated and the new budget allocated. Under this system all educational programmes of a university had to be submitted to the Ministry for re-accreditation every four years, and the Ministry made efforts to move away from an isolated review of individual subjects and to strengthen a holistic evaluation of an institution's overall programme supply (Musselin, 2004: 67 ff.). For the purposes of the four-year review cycle, all French universities were divided into four groups to allow for a staged rhythm of this process, referred to as 'waves' A to D (*vagues*, henceforth 'groups'). The *habilitation* process took place under the responsibility of the DES, and was largely carried out by its bureaucrats with the input of two types of peers: disciplinary experts (*conseillers pédagogiques*) and institutional experts (*conseillers d'établissement*), the latter often former university vice chancellors. Moreover, a range of specific commissions existed for certain types of programmes. A department within the ministry, the *mission scientifique universitaire* (MSU), was in charge of research evaluation but this traditionally did not extend to research-based graduate programmes.

Two other important actors involved in the quality assurance of French HEIs under the supervision of the Ministry in charge of HE or receiving public funding need to be mentioned; the *Inspection générale de l'administration de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche* (IGAENR), itself a department of the Ministry in charge of HE and concentrating on the responsible use of public funds, and the *comité national d'évaluation* (CNE), an independent body concentrating on formative, institutional evaluation. The evaluation results of these two bodies did not have any influence on institutional funding.

Traditionally, the engineering schools represented in the CDEFI operated their own system of quality assurance in which they took great pride. An independent engineering commission, the *commission des titres d'ingénieur* (CTI), was responsible for 'habilitating' engineering degrees on behalf of the Education Ministry, which normally would formally confirm the decision. Since 1995 this procedure was renewed in a six-year rhythm. The title of advanced engineering degrees, '*diplôme d'ingénieur*', was thereby protected. Other *grandes écoles*, notably in the area of business studies, did not have a comparable system, a frequently criticised situation which led to a wide quality spread in this sector. These deficits also explain why French business schools were among the initiators of the

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[208] This system of input control, which does not say much about the actual content and quality of programmes, has to be seen in the context of the strict recruitment procedures of academic staff in France, which ensured that every academic (*enseignant-chercheur*) was socialised and educated according to the same standards (Inteview Curvale, 2004).

European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), an international institutional accreditation body in the field of business administration.[209]

8.2.4 Curricula

Curricular cultures and implied socialisation patterns in French HE differed profoundly between the universities and the *grandes écoles*. Within the university sector, they also differed between its selective and non-selective segments, between sciences and humanities, and between the traditional 'generalist' programmes and the various 'professionalised' alternatives.[210]

The vast majority of students were catered to in the generalist non-selective university sector i.e., the courses leading towards DEUG, *licence*, and *maîtrise*. Degree programmes in this sector were traditionally mono-disciplinary, taught through large lectures combined with smaller-scale seminars. While the first two years were conceived as general foundation studies, the *licence* and *maîtrise* implied increasing specialisation and the *maîtrise* included the first small thesis. Traditionally, the academic year was not divided into terms or semesters. Progression in the French HE system was by academic year which meant that if students did not pass the examination of a certain subject, normally taken at the end of an academic year, they had to repeat an entire one-year course. They could only progress into the second year of studies if they had passed 80% of the first year, although they only had to repeat the exams they had missed (Interview Dubois, 2005). Combined with the time limit of three years to pass the DEUG, this implied quite strict conditions.[211] Given the selectivity of other sectors, the increasing massification of HE since the 1970s (see section 8.2.5 on 'access') had almost been entirely absorbed by this segment of university education. As a result, it was generally characterised by overcrowded lectures, poor student orientation, and low success rates (see for example Cohen & Aghion, 2004 in a devastating report on French HE, as the situation persisted until a few years later; Interview Meynadier, 2004; Renaut, 1995).[212] This was particularly acute in those

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[209] For a comprehensive presentation of the French system of curricular governance, see also Chevaillier (2004).

[210] In French terminology, what is usually referred to as 'academic' is called 'generalist' (*general*) and what is usually referred to as 'professionally-oriented' is called 'professionalised' (*professionalisant*). I stick to the translation that conveys the connotations of the original French terminology.

[211] …although this time limit was not always that strictly applied in practice (Interview Musselin, 2004).

[212] In France, it was not common to document drop-out rates, but the percentage of students achieving the DEUG in two years (28.4%), achieving it at all (59.6%), and the average number of years needed to achieve it (2.7). These numbers apply to the cohort that had entered university in 1994/95. (MEN, 1997).

subjects perceived as relatively easy by university entrants, such as the humanities and social sciences. Only from the fifth year onwards—the DEA and DESS being selective—did students in this sector benefit from smaller groups and more personal tutoring.

The situation was very different in the few selective segments of university education such as the IUTs, where small groups and tightly-structured, closely-guided learning were characteristic from the beginning. Often these were at the same time the more 'professionalised' programmes in technical fields, which had developed close links with industry regarding curriculum design, teaching, and internships.

In response to the problems in the university sector caused by massification, two major attempts at curricular reform and pedagogical renewal had recently been undertaken by the Ministry,[213] one in 1992 by the socialist education minister Lionel Jospin and his special advisor Claude Allègre, and one by the conservative education minister François Bayrou in 1997. Following the recommendations of the Fauroux Commission, Bayrou passed an *arrêté* to reform curricula and teaching methods of programmes leading towards the *licence*. The reform included an attempt to introduce an orientation phase in the first year, the move towards a semester system (*semestrialisation*), the inclusion of methodology modules and internships, and the improvement of student guidance and supervision (*tutorat*). Furthermore, it rendered guidelines for student assessment more favourable for students. This included rules for *compensation* of grades, which implied that failed exams in some courses could be compensated with better grades in other courses, and for *capitalisation*, which implied that passed courses did not lose their value even if the academic year as a whole was failed. The possibilities for *compensation* were now extended to entire modules. Finally, the *arrêté* rendered the regular evaluation of teaching and learning compulsory (AMUE, 2000; Dubois, 2003).[214] Programmes were formally structured into teaching units (*unités d'enseignement*), but these were not transferable between programmes.

The learning experience offered by the *grandes écoles* was profoundly different from anything that could be experienced in universities. The selective entry created relatively homogenous groups of students that would usually stay intact until level '*bac*+5'. The relationship between the student and the school was engaging, and socialisation on campus and networking with the public and private sector through teaching practitioners and alumni was at least as important as the formal curriculum. The identification of students with their school was high, and would usually remain so throughout the graduates' lives.

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[213] In fact, many reforms had been attempted even before that (Interview Musselin, 2004).

[214] …which was poorly implemented however, as shown by the Dejean report (Dejean, 2002).

8.2.5 Access

As has become clear from the above discussion, the distinction between a selective and a non-selective sector was constitutive for the French HE system—to the extent that the difference between universities and *grandes écoles* and their respective curricular cultures could not be explained without reference to selection.

In spite of the important exceptions that existed in reality, the principle of openness of university education to any holder of the final secondary-school exam that qualified for entry to HE (*baccalauréat*, henceforth abbreviated as *bac*) was important for the self-conceptualisation of this sector and generally regarded as an important civic right. The massification of universities was therefore an automatic—though not fully intended—consequence of the policy to increase the number of students achieving the *bac* above 80% of an age cohort by the year 2000 formulated by the Ministry in charge of HE in 1985.[215] In 1998, the number was 62% (MEN, 2005b), 85% of which entered HE (including STS) (MEN, 2004d).[216] This extension was achieved by complementing the classical *bac* first by a technological and then by a professional variant. Student numbers nearly doubled from 1.2 million in 1980/81 to 2.1 million in 1998/99 (MEN, 2001d: 159), and most of this increase was absorbed by the university sector.

To prepare for a classical *bac*, students entered a so-called *lycée* from class 10 onwards (at about 15 years of age) for the last three years of secondary schooling, so that they usually obtained the *bac* at the age of 18. Three streams were distinguished in the classical *bac*, the most prestigious—and the one opening most options for further studies—being science, followed by social sciences and literature (referred to as *bac* S, ES, and L, respectively). The technological *bac* was offered at technological and the professional *bac* at professional *lycées*. In 1998, these three qualifications (classical, technical, and professional *bac*) were achieved by 55%, 29% and 16% of graduates, respectively (MEN, 2004d). Not all types of *bac* qualified equally for all fields of study but generally speaking, the *bac* opened the door for any university studies commencing with the DEUG or DEUST. However, it must be said that few holders of the professional *bac* opted for HE and if they did, their success rate was low. For students without a *bac*, such as those having gone to a vocational *lycée* or done an apprenticeship, different avenues existed to enter HE through special tests or recognition of work experience, but such cases were not the norm. Since 1985, the legal possibility

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[215] See Neave (1991) and Bloch (1996) for more background on this policy.

[216] These numbers imply that 53% of an age group entered HE in 1998. According to OECD numbers only available for 2000, net entry rates into tertiary education type A were 37%, and 67% if type B (which includes IUTs and STS) was included (OECD, 2002). See footnote 109, section 6.2.5 in the German case study for definitions.

existed for entry into HE or the waiver of coursework on the basis of recognition of relevant prior experience and learning (*décret* no. 85-906, 23 August 1985).

Within the 'mainstream' university education, entry to DESS and DEA programmes (upon completion of level '*bac*+4') was the first formal selection point, i.e., the first point where the mere passing of the preceding qualification did not guarantee entry into the next level. It must be said that de facto, selectivity in the first years was high even in the 'non-selective' sector, given high repetition and drop-out rates (see footnote 209 in section 8.2.4), a fact seen as a serious societal problem (Durand-Prinborgne, 1992: 224). Additionally, the—formally—selective sector within the universities encompassed the IUTs, medical studies, and the engineering colleges within universities (all of which selected upon entry to HE) as well as the IUPs (selecting at levels '*bac*+0' to '*bac*+2'), and the *magistère* (at '*bac*+2'). They could devise their own selection criteria, including particular types and grade point averages of the *bac*, tests, motivation statements, and interviews. While the IUTs were originally conceived for holders of the technological *bac*, their selectivity soon enabled them to choose graduates from the more prestigious streams of the classical *bac*.

As described above, *grandes écoles* were in principle always selective, but the degree varied in practice and depended on their prestige and the relationship of demand and supply. The most common entry route into a *grande école* was through the CGPEs, which admitted the best 12 to 13% graduates of the—mostly classical—*bac* (Zwierlein, 2005). Some parents chose the secondary school for their children already with a view to maximising chances for a better CGPE, which helped to prepare the competitive entry examinations (*concours*) of the *grandes écoles*. But *grandes écoles* in engineering also recruited from the best graduates from the IUTs and the DEUST, and in management also from the DEUG, provided that they passed the *concours*. Finally, there was the possibility to enter a *grande école* by passing the entry test without formal preparation, and thus to reach level '*bac*+5' in three years only. Whereas *grandes écoles* were built in principle on meritocracy, in reality their intake was mainly from the higher social classes (Bourdieu, 1988). In the late 1990s, the fact that the most talented students were drawn into the *grandes écoles* sector and not into research was increasingly seen as problematic by university representatives (Interview Musselin, 2004). Another selective segment of post-secondary—though not higher—education was the STS (see section 8.2.1 on 'institutional types').

Ironically, therefore, besides those who opted for a discipline that was exclusively taught at universities such as law or medicine, and those who consciously opted in favour of university culture; entering a university became the 'default option' for those students not accepted by any of the selective branches of post-secondary education, including holders of a technological or professional *bac* who often would have preferred to enter an IUT or STS (Cohen & Aghion, 2004).

8.2.6 Transition to employment

Transition to work from 'generalist' university programmes was generally difficult. Formally these programmes were closely linked to particular entry levels in the public sector. The concept of the '*diplôme national*' played an important role in this regard, as the guaranteed value of certain formal qualification levels was seen as justification for the link between university programmes and pay levels as well as career opportunities in the public service; which in turn served as an important reference for the entire employment system and for the negotiation of wage levels by labour unions.

The DEUG was the minimum qualification for the lowest level of public-sector work (secretarial work), the *licence* for the so-called '*cadre B*' (mid-level administrator) as well as for becoming a school teacher, and the *maîtrise* for the '*cadre A*' i.e., higher public-service careers. All these careers required the additional passing of a competitive exam (*concours*), which functioned as a 'gatekeeper' for entry into the public service.[217] In practice, students tended to acquire more than the minimum qualification before they prepared for the exam, which usually took them another year.

Outside of the public service, attractive options were scarce for students with a 'generalist' background. Effectively, the first 'respectable' entry level of university graduates to the labour market was the *maîtrise* after '*bac*+4'. Leaving before that tended to be regarded as 'drop out', in spite of the annual formal entry options to the labour market from the DEUG onwards.

This was different for graduates from the 'professionalised' programmes within universities. For example, the two-year DUT programmes of the IUTs were the common training for mid-level technicians in industry and had good labour-market prospects—although most DUT graduates chose to continue their studies. Similarly, the various niche programmes of the IUPs as well as the *magistères*—some of which also explicitly prepared for the academic profession—were generally well-linked with the labour market, as were the DESS.

Transition to employment was also relatively easy for graduates of the *grandes écoles*, who invariably left at level '*bac*+5' and were highly-sought young professionals for leading positions in the public and private sector. Nevertheless, graduates were not fully free to choose their career. First, education in a specific *grande école* was usually tied to a particular career track—for example, the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure* (ENA) prepared for top careers in public administration—and was partly paid for by the future employer. It therefore often implied a commitment to serve that employer for a number of years. Second, even within a

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[217] For example, after the *licence*, one could do the CAPES and after the *maîtrise* the more prestigious *aggregation*; recruitment exams for different categories of the teaching profession which at the same time qualified for the necessary teacher training.

specific *grande école*, there were internal rank orders, with the top jobs reserved for the best graduates.

As the professionally-oriented programmes within universities and those of the *grandes écoles* absorbed only a tiny fraction of the overall student population, the problems with transition to employment from university still constituted a significant problem in 1998.

8.2.7   Funding

Overall, the overwhelming portion of funding for public HE in France came from the national government.[218] The ministry in charge of HE provided the basic funding for HEIs under its authority; namely the universities, the public engineering schools and the IUTs which, although a part of the universities, nevertheless enjoyed budget autonomy. The bulk of funding was provided directly by the ministry in the form of salaries for their tenured staff.[219] The allocation of the operating budget, which was only a minor part of the overall allocation, was determined partly through an input-oriented formula mainly based on student numbers and partly through the contract policy (*politique contractuelle*). In the years since the inception of the contract policy in 1989, the part of the operating budget linked to contracts varied between 10-30%. Additionally, the ministry also paid a research grant; the great majority of research funding was however channelled into the national research organisation CNRS (see section 8.2.1 on 'institutional types') (Eurydice, 2000b). In 1997, about 51% of universities' operating budget came directly from the ministry in charge of HE; most of it was spent on teaching. Six percent of the funds came from other ministries, 5% from local authorities, 10% from registration fees, 2% from a so-called 'apprenticeship' tax paid by firms, 6% from funding bodies for research, and 20% from institutions' own income (Frans Kaiser, 2001: 38). Publicly-recognised private HEIs also received state funding based on individual contracts.

Although public expenditure for HE increased steadily in absolute terms in the period from 1991 to 1998, it remained fairly constant as a percentage of GDP (Frans Kaiser et al., 2001), and insufficient funding remained a perennial issue

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[218] Data on HE funding in France is scarce. To give some indication, according to the national education account (*Compte de l'éducation*, 2003), in 2003 89.9% of all teaching funds for public universities came from the national government, 5.4% from local government and other administration, 1.4% from business and 3.2% from households.

[219] Following Kaiser (2001), of the HE budget for public universities in 1998, totalling €7.4 bio, only 21% went to universities as operating budget, 55% were paid directly in the form of salaries, 3.7% were spent on buildings, and 17% on student support.

between the ministry and universities.[220] With 1.1% of GDP in 1998, funding of tertiary education was below the OECD mean of 1.3% and the annual expenditure per student of 7,226 US$ was both below the OECD mean and the level in Germany, UK, or the Netherlands (OECD, 2001). These numbers still hide the rather important discrepancies between the relatively high average public expenditure for a student studying at a CGPE, *grande école*, IUT, and STS, as compared to a university student (MEN, 2006).[221]

University studies were generally free of fees, but there was a moderate registration charge of about €130 per academic year for most subjects, rarely exceeding €300 per year. It was higher in engineering and medical studies and certain selective programmes (up to about €800), but always set by the Ministry in charge of HE. At *grandes écoles*, a wider spectrum was possible and quite substantial fees were common particularly at business schools, which could add up to €6000 (Edufrance, 2005; Frans Kaiser et al., 2001). Student support was mainly through grants for students from low-income families (*bourses sur critères sociaux*); this did not exceed €245 per month however and covered only about 30% of students. Universities also supported graduate students to a limited extent (*bourses sur critères universitaires*) based on merit and there were very limited possibilities for interest-free credits. Furthermore, the French state provided a wide range of indirect and in-kind student support through tax subsidies and child allowances for parents, as well as subsidies for housing and transport (F. Kaiser & Vossensteyn, 2005).

8.3   Policy formulation

Policy formulation on the adaptation of degree structures in the course of the Bologna process took place in two main waves, and under four different education ministers. The first wave of policy formulation started even before the Sorbonne declaration[222] and culminated in the decrees[223] of autumn 1999, right

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[220] Adequate time series numbers from the OECD are not available. To give some indication, the index of change in direct public funding of institutions in French tertiary education raised from 100 (1990) to 132 (1996) (OECD, 2000: Table B1.2).

[221] According to the French Ministry in charge of HE (MEN, 2006), the average expenditure of French society (including the state, regional governments, firms, and households) per student in HE varied enormously by institutional type. For 1994/2004, respectively, it was €9,365/12,295 in STS, €12,055/13,757 in CGPE, €9,105/9,160 in IUT, and €5,744/6,695 in universities (excluding IUTs and engineering schools). Average expenditure per HE student was €7,410/8,627, respectively.

[222] While policy formulation was not yet linked to any European process before the Sorbonne declaration, the preparations culminated in a legal provision clearly embedded in the European context.

after the Bologna declaration. This regulation introduced the *grade de master* (Masters degree, initially spelled '*mastaire*') as an umbrella degree encompassing a range of existing qualifications at level '*bac*+5', and the *licence professionelle*; a new, professionally-oriented variant of the existing university qualification at level '*bac*+3'.

The second wave of policy formulation began in early 2001 with a stakeholder consultation preparing a series of decrees ultimately passed in spring 2002. These decrees rendered the transition to a new degree structure based on two main cycles up to the Masters level more concrete, introducing a *diplôme national de master* (a new qualification at Masters level based on specific, state-controlled criteria), and specifying curricular reform ambitions for the existing *grade de licence*. These decrees were accompanied by intense stakeholder dialogue and a policy plan for the transition to the new structure using the framework of the existing contract policy between the ministry and universities. At the heart of this policy plan was making the transition to the new degree structure voluntary,[224] and leaving it up to HEIs whether and when to move. The contract policy determined the pace of transition. It divided universities into four regional groups which had to resubmit their degree programmes to the ministry for *habilitation* in a four-year rhythm (see section 8.2.3 on 'curricular governance'), and the reform was therefore to take place in four annual waves starting with group A in the academic year 2003/04 and ending with group D by 2006/07. However, three pilot universities made the transition as early as autumn 2002. The *grandes écoles*, most of which did not fall under the supervision of the ministry in charge of HE, were only marginally touched by these developments. The period after spring 2002 was characterised by multiple feedback loops between policy implementation and ongoing adjustment of policy formulation through ministerial circulars accompanying the transition. In 2003, the then minister in charge of HE also made an attempt to anchor the new degree structure in the national education act. This was however impeded by fierce protests from some student and staff unions. I will now elaborate on this process in more detail.

8.3.1 Minister Allègre's policy agenda

Policy formulation on the reform of degree structures was initiated by education minister Claude Allègre, who took office in June 1997 under the new socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin. Allègre had been Jospin's special advisor in his

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[223] The French legislative system distinguishes between *décrét* and *arrêté,* both of which are translated as decrees as there is no terminology in English to distinguish the two. In terms of legal hierarchies, a *décrét* is higher-ranking than an *arrêté*.

[224] It can be debated whether the transition was voluntary in practice, as the normative pressure was high; but formally it was voluntary and there were no deadlines attached to the transition.

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earlier term of office from 1988 to 1992. In that period, he had already initiated a number of other important HE reforms such as the instruction of the contract policy between the ministry and HEIs (Musselin, 2004: 67 ff.), the creation of the IUPs, and a failed attempt at broadening the humanities curriculum in the first two years of university study. Upon his return to government in 1997, Allègre also brought in a new head of the DES, Francine Demichel, a professor of law whom he had worked with before, and his own cabinet of personal advisors. The cooperation and interplay between the minister, his cabinet, and the administration was key to policy making in that period and the head of the DES played an important intermediary role between the political visions formulated by the minister and their implementation through the HE administration.

The first phase of policy formulation under Allègre's term of office, from mid-1997 to spring 2000, was characterised by a light-touch approach to reform: highly consultative, with a minimum of regulation and pressure from the Ministry, based on confidence in the intrinsic motivation of HEIs themselves to reform, but guided by a very clear and strong ministerial vision. Basically, Allègre had three aims:[225]

First, he wanted to overcome, as far as possible, the dichotomy between universities and *grandes écoles* which he saw as impeding the development of research excellence in several ways: wasting scarce resources on unproductive demarcations between the sectors, directing the most talented young people into the formation of public and private management elites instead of research, and splitting resources too thinly to create the critical mass needed for research (many of the *grandes écoles* were in fact very small).

Second, he intended to resume the curricular reforms he had attempted in the early 1990s and that had also been pursued by his predecessor Bayrou. Specifically, he wanted to improve labour-market perspectives for university students (*professionalisation*) below the Masters level, increase the student orientation as opposed to the discipline orientation of university studies, and abandon the *maquettes* that were standardising curricula across HEIs. All this was meant to help overcome high drop-out rates and poor success rates in the first years of university studies.

Third, Allègre saw the need to open up the traditionally, strongly inward-oriented French HE system internationally. He intended to use the third aim as a lever to pursue the first two, a strategy that took shape over the course of his first year in office.

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[225] This summary is based on document analysis and a range of top-level interviews, particularly with Claude Allègre himself, Francine Demichel, and Pierre Korolitski, another high-ranking bureaucrat in the DES.

8.3.2 Initial moves: Attali report and Sorbonne declaration in 1998

In July 1997 already, Allègre asked Jacques Attali[226] to establish a commission to make proposals on how to overcome the inherited dichotomy between the universities and *grandes écoles*. In the assignment letter he presented this dichotomy as the key impediment to France meeting the challenges of the 21st century, namely international competition, European integration, globalisation, and the acceleration of scientific process (Allègre, 1997). Allègre did not call for an end of the binary divide, but for "bringing them closer together with regard to research, teaching, diplomas and the permeability between the sectors for students" (ibid: own translation). Albeit in a vague form, the assignment thus already formulated a central element of the later reforms, to use the reform of HE degrees as a lever to narrow the gap between universities and *grandes écoles*.

The commission was composed of renowned personalities from politics, academia, and industry. There was a close exchange between Allègre's cabinet and the Commission while drafting the recommendations to ensure that they would be politically feasible. The report started out from an in-depth critical assessment of the status quo. The French HE system was characterised as "a confused system, [an] heritage of long power struggles" (Attali et al., 1998: 10) which was not capable of coping with the challenges of the knowledge society. The Commission argued that this knowledge society found expression in "four revolutions", namely "in science and technology", "in the links between HE and the state", "in the links between HE and the firms", and "in the rhythm of knowledge acquisition" (ibid: 21-23). The central solution put forward was to move from a three- to a two-cycle structure, following a "3/5 or 8"-model (ibid: 32)—i.e., "3+2 or 5" if counted in years per cycle. The first exit level from HE was to be the *licence*, as "neither the DEUG nor the *classes préparatoires* correspond to a real professional exit level". The *licence* was envisaged as a degree that was "at the same time general and professional". The second cycle should either lead to what was at the time called a "new *maîtrise*", a professionally-oriented two-year qualification; or directly into a five-year phase of doctoral studies. No selection was envisaged upon entry to the second cycle. The new structure was based on the principle that "no programmes may lead into a dead end". Programmes were to be structured in semesters and fully modularised, allowing them "to be interrupted at any moment without losing the benefit of the semesters already validated" (ibid: 32-24). I now trace how the idea emerged that this particular two-cycle structure was the solution to the perceived problems.

Here, the preparation of the Sorbonne declaration comes into play. In early 1998, half-way through the formulation of the Attali report (Ravinet, 2005b), Allègre had the idea to use the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne for a media-

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[226] Jacques Attali was a renowned personality and member of the Council of State (*Conseiller d'Etat*), a position in which he had also been personal advisor of Francois Mitterand.

effective celebration to which he would invite education ministers from other European countries (see chapter 5). In the first months of 1998, the formulation of the Sorbonne declaration and the Attali report proceeded in parallel and influenced each other. Allègre recalls that

> this commission [i.e., the Attali Commission] made a proposition to modify the programmes and make the equivalent of "undergraduate" in three years…while we were on an interruption of four years. At the beginning, I was sufficiently reticent and then I started to talk about this problem with my European colleagues and notably with the German minister Jürgen Rüttgers (Interview Allègre, 2004, own translation).

The quote demonstrates that the 3+2 or 5-structure did not necessarily follow from the French context. The level '*bac*+2' was well established in France, with the DEUG, DEUST, *classes préparatoires*, DUT and BTS as two-year qualifications. The *maîtrise* at level *bac*+4 was the most frequent entry point into the labour market, and Allègre had himself created the IUPs which delivered a professional *maîtrise* at this level. Furthermore, the engineering schools had by that time begun to deliver a *mastère* at level '*bac*+6'. Therefore Allègre initially preferred a 2/4/6/8-model. Although the idea for a 3+2 or 5-model initially came from the Attali commission, discussion with the German education minister was critical for convincing him that the 3+2 or 5-model was the way forward (see chapter 5 on the consequences of this conversation at the European level).

The Attali report was a purely national report and not based on any significant Europe-wide research effort. Nevertheless, briefly before its publication on 5 May 1998 and only a few days before the Sorbonne conference, the report was named "Towards a European model of HE". This title and the proximity in time to the Sorbonne declaration were the source of the widespread incorrect impression that the latter recommended a '3/5/8'-model. It is however true that many other aims of the Sorbonne declaration resonated French reform ambitions of that period.[227] The Attali report was not received favourably by the French HE sector, and while the ministry maintained the essential ideas, it quickly dropped any reference to the report in the official discourse. Instead, the Sorbonne—and a year later, the Bologna—declarations became the central reference points and legitimation for the ensuing reforms in French HE (see for example MEN, 1998b: *I - Les finalités*).

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[227] In addition to the two-cycle structure, this included modularisation and the move to a semester system, the importance of widening participation and life-long learning, the strengthening of foreign-language teaching in HE, and the promotion of European student mobility (see Europe chapter).

8.3.3 First wave of regulation: the 'light-touch' decrees of 1999

In December 1998, the ministry formally opened consultations with relevant stakeholders to prepare the first wave of regulation to translate the Sorbonne aims into French HE policy. It consisted of two decrees, one creating a new Masters-level degree, the *mastaire,* and one a new degree at Bachelor level, the *licence professionelle*.[228]

The ministry's initial position paper "HE: European harmonisation" (MEN, 1998b) already set out many of the key ideas that were later formalised, concerning both the design of the two-cycle degree structure and the implementation policy.

Regarding the design of the degree structure, the ministry justified the proposed measures with reference to the Sorbonne declaration. Its implications were framed in terms of two main elements: first, "the organisation of studies in two programmes recognised in the European area, pre-*licence* and post-*licence*, which the student could obtain in portable credits", and second, "three levels of recognition of degrees corresponding to the existence of an international standard of *bac*+3 (*licence*), *bac*+5 (*mastaire*) and *bac*+8 (doctorate)" (ibid: I – *Les finalités*). Two important 'translations' were implicit in this presentation of the essence of the Sorbonne declaration that would shape the entire course of policy formulation in France: the equation of the first cycle with the *licence* (while it could, in principle, also have been the *maîtrise*), and the parallel discourse of a two-cycle (pre-*licence*, post-*licence*) and a three-cycle (3/5/8) structure. In fact, neither would be challenged in the ensuing debate.

Regarding the degree structure, the document put forward a central element of the minister's initial approach that would come to play an important role in the French reform discourse, namely that "no currently existing *diplôme* will be suppressed; (…) the European harmonisation consists of *highlighting certain levels*" [emphasis added]. This also included the promise that "the process of European harmonisation will not affect any collective agreements" (ibid: II – *Principes et méthodes*). The reason was the fact that both public and private French salary structures were closely tied to traditional education levels. This stood in tension with the objective to diminish the number of levels to increase European readability. The minister's fear of student and union protest in the case of the abolition of certain degrees also played an important role. At the time, the

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[228] Earlier, Allègre took an initiative to create *EduFrance*, an agency to promote French HE internationally, to provide services to foreign students, and to coordinate the French participation in international cooperation projects in HE. This was one of the first tangible HE reform measures implemented by Allègre. Up to that point, no French counterpart had existed to similar agencies in other European countries, such as the Dutch NUFFIC or the German DAAD (MEN, 1998a). *EduFrance* was established in November 1998 through an inter-ministerial decree by the HE minister and the minister of international affairs, Hubert Védrine.

ministry envisaged a highly incremental approach to change, based on the idea that this would allow "for mobility while conserving national diversity and uniqueness" (ibid). As I will show, the reform would later move far beyond 'highlighting certain levels'.

At the undergraduate level, the main innovation by the ministry was the creation of a new national degree programme (*diplôme national*), the *licence professionelle*. It would convey the same rights as the traditional *licence* regarding both the continuation of studies and entry into the public service, but would have a clear labour-market orientation through close involvement of practitioners and mandatory internships etc. The right to grant the *licence professionelle* should be reserved for universities, but the course provision was to take place in cooperation with IUTs, IUPs, *écoles*, and even *lycées* (for BTS). It would be open to holders of different qualifications at level '*bac+2*', such as DEUG, DEUST, DUT, BTS, as well as to mature students (ibid: III - *Le cursus pré-licence*). Behind this innovation was the plan to overcome the dichotomy between universities and IUTs. Basically, the *licence professionelle* was conceived of as an integrative third year for students from different backgrounds; offering a more pronounced labour-market orientation to university students and a broader qualification at level '*bac*+3' to IUT students.

At the graduate level, the ministry intended a differentiation between a "short track" to directly enter the labour-market and a "long track" to continue towards doctoral studies, with transfer routes from one to the other. For the short track, they planned the creation of a new national degree programme, the *mastaire*, which would be granted to those having followed the DESS and other existing professionally-oriented programmes ending at level '*bac*+5'.[229] For the long track, the document envisaged strengthening the integration of the existing DEA into graduate schools (*écoles doctorales*) and fostering inter-institutional cooperation (including universities with *grandes écoles*) in delivering graduate degrees (ibid: IV – *Les cursus post-licence*).

Regarding institutional types, the document included a special section on the cooperation of universities and *grandes écoles*. It encouraged them to cooperate at all levels e.g., by granting university degrees to *grande-école* students, allowing entry into *grandes écoles* at an adequate level for *licence* graduates, and by jointly providing doctoral degrees etc.

Regarding curricular reform, the document also announced ambitious plans affirming the ministry's intention to continue the course set by the 1992 and 1997 reforms of Allègre and Bayrou, such as *semesterialisation*, *compensation* and *capitalisation*, recognition of prior learning, and further education (see section 8.2.4

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[229] In this context, the existence of IUP degrees at level '*bac*+4', such as the *ingénieur-maître*, constituted a problem—they had been created by Allègre himself in an earlier reform. The document suggested maintaining these degrees as well as extending the IUP programmes by another year for them to be able to grant the new *mastaire*.

on 'curricula'). It included the idea of creating programme tracks or macro-modules (*parcours*, henceforth referred to as 'tracks') and improving transition paths between courses (*passerelles)*, and expressed the hope that all this would contribute to reducing drop-out. With respect to access, the ministry promised that there would be no change in student selection, including entry to the *mastaire*.

From the outset, the minister stressed that he intended to pursue an open-ended, consultative approach to implementation policy. Policy formulation would take place according to a "progressive method which allows, at each point in time, to observe, consult and adjust, and not lead to "any overthrow of our HE system". More concretely, the document envisaged a series of formal consultations with the CNESER and a wide spectrum of representative organisations of HEIs (CPU, CGE, CDEFI, ADIUT, and ADIUP). Accounting for strong political sensitivities attached to a reform of the national HE law, the minister appeased the sector with the promise that there would be no need for "a new law on HE". The decision to introduce new degree structures by a series of decrees rather than a change of law was thus taken early in the process. The document also proposed using the existing contract policy as the main instrument for implementation and promised that the transition would be completely voluntary (ibid: II – *Principes et méthodes*).

The stakeholder consultations lasted from December 1998 until autumn 1999. The resulting two decrees on the *grade de mastaire* and the *licence professionelle* were passed in August and November 1999, respectively.[230]

THE FIRST DECREE. Regarding the Masters-level degree, the ministry in charge of HE[231] chose a unique reform avenue that was intended not to threaten *grandes écoles* and nevertheless help bridge the gap between them and the universities; it brought to attention a national legal distinction which had not played a role in the debate up to that point, the distinction between *grade* and *diplôme*. While the *grade* indicated the attainment of a general educational level, the ministry argued, the *diplôme* certified the mastery of a specific discipline and curriculum. The same *grade* could therefore be reached by means of different *diplômes* (MEN, 2001a). Furthermore, the ministry recalled that the French HE system was lacking a *grade*

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[230] The Bologna declaration fell into this consultation period. In the context of the French discussions, it is interesting to have a closer look at the French translation of the key section in the Bologna declaration regarding the two-cycle degree structures. Just as for the Sorbonne declaration, the French version spoke of "a system essentially based on two courses, before and after the licence". The term 'Master' was translated as *mastaire*, in line with the French decree creating the *grade de mastaire* which was already under preparation (Décret no 99-747, 1999). The potential awareness that these qualification levels were possibly referred to differently in the international discourse was again not fostered by the French phrasing.

[231] This strategy largely goes back to then head of the DES, Francine Demichel.

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at Masters level; since the time of Napoleon I, *baccalauréat*,[232] *licence*, and *doctorat* (the doctorate) had been the only *grades*. Based on this argument, the need to introduce a new *grade de mastaire* could be presented as a logical solution, filling a century-long gap in the French degree structure. Moreover, the right to confer a *grade* had so far been confined to universities so that extending the right to grant the *grade de mastaire* to *grandes écoles* could be presented as a gift. Finally, the introduction of the *grade de mastaire* fit the idea of European levels of equivalence which Allègre had put forward in the Sorbonne declaration (see Europe chapter). As the English term 'degree' is translated into French as *grade*, the creation of a new *grade* in French HE seemed to directly correspond to the European commitments (MEN, 2001a)—notwithstanding the fact that the French distinction between *grade* and *diplôme* did not exist elsewhere in Europe.

The relevant decree was passed in August 1999 (Décret no 99-747, 1999). It effectively created an 'umbrella degree' for existing qualifications at level '*bac*+5' by conferring the right to carry the title '*grade de mastaire*'[233] in addition to their existing *diplôme* not only to holders of a university DEA or DESS but to holders of *grandes écoles* degrees at this level. For engineering qualifications 'accredited' by the CTI (*diplôme d'ingénieur*), this right was granted without restrictions. For other qualifications of the *grandes écoles*, notably in management and business administration which were so far not subject to any external quality assurance, the mechanism for granting this right was left to further specification. In April 2001, a national 'accreditation' body was installed specifically to this end; the Helfer Commission (Décret no 2001-295, 2001). It make its first decisions in Summer 2002.

THE SECOND DECREE. While the main issue regarding the *grade de mastaire* involved the relationship between universities and *grandes écoles*, the stakeholder dialogue about the *licence professionelle* was about the balancing of interests between the representatives of universities (CPU), the IUTs (ADIUT), employers (MEDEF) and unions (mainly SGEN and CDFT); and reconciling them with the aims of the ministry. The main aim of the ministry was to create realistic exit options for university students of the DEUG who would not continue their studies up to the Masters level, thereby also reducing drop-out. This was well in line with the interest of the CPU, which had been a strong supporter of the *licence professionelle* from the beginning (see for example CPU (1999)). Already prior to the Bologna process, the IUTs had lobbied to extend their traditional two-year DUT to an integrated programme of three-years, which they perceived as more in

[232] In France the *baccalauréat*, which is examined by university professors, is regarded as the first university degree.
[233] The term '*mastaire*' was later modified to '*master*' with retrospective effect, to bring it in line with European terminology (Décret no 2002-480, 2002). At the time, the title *mastaire* was chosen to avoid conflict with some *grandes écoles* that had protected the term *master* under patent law. The titles *maîtrise* and *magistère* were already used by existing degrees.

line with European standards. They saw the *licence professionelle* as an opportunity to achieve this aim. The MEDEF, while supporting the general aims of European cooperation and readability of degrees, was opposed to a universal extension of IUT programmes to three years. They were afraid of the associated wage increases, particularly since the current two-year DUT generally satisfied employer needs. The unions initially held a divided position as they were generally in favour of professionalising university studies, but critical of blocking avenues for further studies.

The design of the *licence professionelle* was developed in a consultative process. The direction was set by the ministry, but a wide range of stakeholders were involved in a working group that ultimately agreed on the major aspects. The ministry and the CPU basically got their way and established the *licence professionelle* as a third year of studies to be offered in cooperation between universities and IUTs (or other institutions), but always under university leadership, and open to students from different backgrounds. The MEDEF successfully prevented the general extension of IUT programmes to three years, but accepted that the *licence professionelle* strengthened '*bac*+3' as a relevant qualification level. The unions developed a more favourable attitude towards the reform after the Bologna declaration, which confirmed the European perspective. Domestically and abroad, the ministry consistently presented the introduction of the *licence professionelle* as a consequence of France's "European commitments to provide for a pre-degree curriculum that meets European labour market needs" (MEN, 2001c). In November 1999, the decree on the *licence professionelle* (*Arrêté licence professionelle*, 1999) became effective after passing the CNESER with a large majority (MEN, 1999c, 1999d).

The major innovations of the *licence professionelle* were the freedom given to institutions to design their own programmes and the high degree of cooperation with employers in course provision and quality assurance (MEN, 1999b). Both resulted in a degree of curricular diversity previously unknown at this level. In addition, a special commission (*commission nationale d'expertise,* CNE), composed in equal parts of university academics and professionals, was set up to 'accredit' all new *licence professionelle* programmes (MEN, 1999a). The decree also established a follow-up committee (*comité de suivi licence professionelle*) meant to bundle feedback from implementation experience. It was comprised of employer, union and HE representatives and began in December 2000.[234]

The two decrees on the *grade de mastaire* and the *licence professionelle* remained the only regulatory measures of the ministry under Allègre's term of office. Overall,

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[234] The first 178 accredited *licence professionelle* programmes began in the academic year 2000/2001. They were distributed over 46 agreed specialisations (*denominations*), with 4400 enrolled students, of which 31% studied in IUTs, 20% in STS, and 21% in other university tracks (AMUE, 2001). Clearly, the huge percentage of *licence professionelle* programmes offered by IUTs was not in line with the original intentions and reflected the strong interest of IUTs in a third year of studies.

the ministerial policy stance in this period can be characterised as 'light touch': universities were not forced to offer *licence professionelle* programmes; this was just a new option; and the *grade de mastaire* as an umbrella degree did not effect the existing practices and qualifications at Masters level. Policy change in this period was largely informal, relying on the voluntary initiative of institutions. Nevertheless, it was significant: the ministry encouraged universities to come up with their own curricular designs independent of national curriculum frameworks (*maquettes*), supported the cooperation between academics and professionals and between different types of HEIs, and managed to achieve the integration of a number of smaller *grandes écoles* into universities under a new 'campus policy' (*politique des sites*).

While Allègre's HE policy was received favourably by the sector and the general public, he was forced to step down in April 2000 over public resistance to his disputed, and allegedly 'neo-liberal' school policy. Allègre was succeeded by Jack Lang, who had already been education minister from April 1992 to March 1993.

8.3.4 Second wave of regulation: the decree framework of 2002

Lang's term of office as education minister marked the end of the largely regulation-free early phase of the French transition to the two-cycle degree structure. The next stage of policy formulation was basically geared to a stronger framing of the reform by the ministry, regarding both its content and the implementation policy. This included the successive formulation of clear guidelines for the reform of degrees and curricula and a time plan for the transition. The ministry began stakeholder consultations for the next stage of policy formulation in early 2001. After intense discussions during that summer, the initiative culminated in a set of about ten decrees passed in April 2002, right before the change of government.

The ministry's opening document for this phase of stakeholder consultations was titled "Construction of the European HE area: orientations for a new stage" and circulated informally in the sector (MEN, 2001b) in early 2001. In April, the minister officially presented his policy plans to the CNESER. In his speech "Pedagogical orientations for HE" (Lang, 2001b), he framed the entire reform under the dual aim of widening access and improving quality; naming the increase of student numbers as the underlying rationale which, according to him, necessitated a new "contract" of HEIs with the state—and ultimately the entire society (ibid: conclusions). Again, Lang referred to European developments to

support his project.[235] In July the ministry published another discussion paper to resolve some controversial issues (MEN, 2001a).

Three projects were at the core of the new reform impetus: first, increased efforts at curricular reform, the major policy instrument being ECTS; second, the consolidation of the new degree structure, notably by means of the creation of a *diplôme national de master* (an idea that only took shape in the course of the political discussion); and third, the reform of the national quality assurance system for degree programmes (*habilitation*) allowing for increased curricular diversity.

The opening document (MEN, 2001b) and Lang's speech (2001b) focused on the introduction of ECTS, which was on the one hand intended to promote international student mobility,[236] and on the other to further a whole set of curricular reform ambitions pending since before the Bayrou reforms. Among them were the application of the principles of student workload,[237] modularisation, *capitalisation*, and the expression of levels in terms of credits rather than years. Wider reform ambitions were to improve student guidance in the first year of studies and increase the flexibility and diversity of learning paths. This should be achieved by introducing multi-disciplinary curricula, re-organising studies into coherent specialisation options or 'tracks' (*parcours)*, and defining transition paths (*passerelles*) between them; also by improving counselling to facilitate student choice and reorientation, easing the recognition of prior learning in non-university contexts, strengthening professionalisation (e.g., through the recognition of internships in terms of credits), and improving the permeability between different types of institutions. These measures were complemented by increased attention to the teaching of foreign languages and IT skills. In an effort to pre-empt possible critiques, the minister stressed that he did not propose a "supermarket" model of HE and that the coherence of degree programmes should be maintained (ibid: *La coherence des parcours proposés*).

Regarding the degree structure, the ministry put forward the concept of an integrated two-year trajectory for the Masters phase with progressive orientation

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[235] In addition to the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations and the Nice Summit, he cited the establishment of the EUA (under a French president, Eric Froment), the Salamanca convention, and the ESIB meeting in Göteborg; and promised 1000 international mobility grants for students in the next academic year.

[236] From July to December 2000, France had held the European Council Presidency, and Lang had used this to promote a European action plan to foster student mobility. It was formally signed by the heads of state at the Nice Summit in December 2000. Consequently, the introduction of ECTS was presented in the context not only of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations, but also the Nice mobility agenda.

[237] While programmes had traditionally been structured in 'teaching units' (*unités d'enseignement*), taking into account student workload and recognising student achievement when transferring between programmes was new. They were now also referred to as '*unitiés de valeur*'.

towards a professional or research route. In this context, the ministry proposed to create a single *diplôme de master* conferring the right to the *grade de mastaire* and that would embrace not only DEA and DESS, but also the special Masters programmes for foreigners in engineering (MEN, 2001b: paragraph 17). These suggestions marked an important step in policy formulation: while the *grade de mastaire* had only been a formal umbrella degree on top of the existing *diplôme* programmes, the reform had now moved on to the adaptation of these *diplôme* programmes themselves and their curricula.

The ministry also made initial proposals on the reform of curricular governance i.e., the *habilitation* process. In this speech, Lang emphasised the ministry's intention to strengthen the curricular autonomy of HEIs and teaching teams, and the hope that they would adopt a more strategic approach to curricular design. Towards this end, he intended to move from an *habilitation* "*diplôme* by *diplôme*" to the *habilitation* of an institution's "entire programme supply" (Lang, 2001b: *Une capacité d'initiative élargie mais une évaluation renforcée*). Towards this end, HEIs were asked to present their courses along "grand domains of education" (*domaines de formation*, henceforth referred to as 'domains') i.e., integrated thematic areas that need not be congruent with traditional disciplinary boundaries and would possibly encompass several disciplines, roughly comparable to the US-American concept of 'schools' (MEN, 2001b: paragraph 13).[238] This concept would later prove to be very difficult to implement and was in need of repeated clarification. As a counterweight to the increased freedom, the minister proposed strengthening the methods of national quality assurance. Anticipating sensitivities in the sector, he stressed that the increase of curricular diversity was in no way meant to put into question "the national coherence and national character of *diplômes*" (Lang, 2001b: paragraph 14); an issue that would become subject to continued dispute in the next few years. The ministry would continue to argue that for the first time the new approach to quality assurance would be based on real evaluation of substance and quality rather than on purely formalistic examination; this would actually strengthen, not weaken the *diplôme national* (see for example MEN, 2002d), and student and staff unions would continue to challenge this assumption.

Finally, the ministry gave a clearer direction to the implementation policy: it proposed the gradual and voluntary implementation of the reforms by HEIs in the following five years (i.e., until 2006), framed by new regulation and the *habilitation* process in the course of the contract policy. When their programmes were due for re-*habilitation*, HEIs would have the choice to move to the new system or to stick to the traditional one: "during a period of five years, two regulatory frameworks could co-exist at national level in order to leave the choice

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[238] In Art. 8 of the *arrêté licence* (2002) they were later defined as an ensemble of "several disciplines and of their fields of application, notably professional."

and the mastery of the rhythm of adaptation up to institutions" (MEN, 2001b: paragraph 13). In choosing this approach, the ministry was aware of the German model which had left it up to institutions whether and when they would make the transition to the new degree structure (Lang, 2001b).[239] The minister also announced his intention to cooperate with other ministries to extend the reform to those parts of HE not under his authority i.e., the *grandes écoles* (ibid).

The proposals of the ministry stimulated intensive debate in the sector that continued throughout summer and autumn 2001. In general, the CPU was strongly supportive of the reform which it saw as a unique opportunity for strengthening the profile of French universities and for internal curricular reform as well as for enhanced European cooperation and student mobility (CPU, 2001). By contrast, staff and student unions such as SNESUP and UNEF were very critical, although they supported the aspects of the reform that were related to Europeanisation and curricular reform. The major concern of the IUTs and IUPs was how they would be affected by the new degree architecture, and what would happen to the intermediate qualification levels that were important to them other than 3/5/8. For the CDEFI and the CTI, the main issue was to what degree they would be affected by the planned introduction of a common *diplôme de master*. The other *grandes écoles* largely kept themselves out of the debate. I now look in detail at the debates on the three main themes of the reform; curricular reform, the degree structure, and the *habilitation* system.

The ministry's curricular reform ambitions and the introduction of ECTS raised many conceptual and practical questions including the demand for additional money for implementation (CPU, 2001; SNESUP, 2001), but none of the major national actors questioned these plans in principal. It quickly became clear however, that there was tension between the ministerial aim to stimulate the initiative of HEIs and academics, and the call of actors for a clearer national framing of the reform.[240] Key elements of the curricular reforms, such as the creation of 'tracks', and how to strike the right balance between overly-rigid degree programmes and a "supermarket model" of HE, needed repeated clarification from the ministry. It also proved difficult in practice to reconcile the bottom-up development of programmes and 'tracks' within 'domains' with the national coherence of degree specialisations (*dénominations*).

The second issue of debate was the intended simplification of the degree structure. Successively, the ministry made its plans for strengthening the *licence*, *mastaire*, and *doctorat* more and more specific (MEN, 2001a), and started to move beyond the initial approach of only "highlighting" these levels (see section 8.3.3).

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[239] In one of my interviews, a high-ranking ministerial representative referred to the French implementation policy chosen for this reform as "*à l'Allemande*" (Interview Korolitski, 2004).

[240] In his speech, Lang hinted to this phenomenon as "a French paradox: the more strongly national policies are outlined, the more [local] initiatives flourish" (Lang, 2001b: *Une capacité d'initiative élargie mais une évaluation renforcée*).

At the Masters level, the ministry proposed merging the wide range of existing university qualifications, such as "IUP, MST, MSG, MIAGE, *Magistère*, DESS, DEA" into a single and "unique, but diversified programme" the *diplôme national de mastaire* (MEN, 2001a). This was a step beyond the creation of the *grade de mastaire,* as it would not only complement but alleviate the diversity of graduate degrees at universities. Within the new framework, the ministry sought to achieve a better integration of the course provision while maintaining the wide spectrum of student choice. The vision was to allow for flexible student 'tracks' within an integrated overall offer. Masters programmes would be organised in two main orientations, "research" and "professional", corresponding to the traditional DEA and DESS but more fluid.

Naturally, these plans raised questions about the future of a wide spectrum of existing qualifications at all levels. Several actors, notably student and academic staff unions, criticised the plan to successively weaken the qualification levels '*bac*+2' and '*bac*+4' which they considered important exit options to the labour market for students. SNESUP saw the risk of an "end of education at level *bac*+3 for the majority" (SNESUP, 2001), as they imagined that few students would manage to complete a full *mastaire* programme. Furthermore, the SNESUP warned of a loss of professionalisation with the reorganisation of traditional programmes like MST, MSG, and those of the IUPs, such as *ingénieur-maître*. The ministry responded by justifying the need for a simplification of the degree structure and a stronger regulatory framing of the reform with the "readability of the French university provision". It emphasised the political aim to overcome the negative effects of the multitude of *diplôme* programmes and respective regulatory frameworks, and give a structuring and orientating function to the *grades* (MEN, 2001a: Questions 3: *Mais alors, qu'y a-t-il de changé?*). Yet, it envisaged maintaining the DEUG.

The heaviest debate ensued on the intended reform of the *habilitation* process. In the eyes of some actors, particularly student and academic staff unions such as SNESUP and UNEF, the envisaged higher degree of curricular autonomy and diversity would threaten the concept of the *diplôme national*. In their eyes the latter necessitated maintaining the formal homogeneity of degree programmes across the country. They feared the breach with the inherited system, which had detailed the format and content of each programme in the form of a national curriculum framework (*maquette*). They were also opposed to possible competition between universities, which might be stimulated by increased differentiation (SNESUP, 2001). Student bodies were particularly concerned that the equivalence of degrees obtained in different universities might suffer from the reform. The ministry responded by emphasising the weaknesses of the inherited *habilitation* process, such as its "administrative heaviness" and "often formal character", insisting on the need for a "real evaluation of quality" (MEN, 2001a). It confirmed that "the entire French HE system is based on the principle of the *diplôme national* guaranteed by the state" (ibid), but held that increased institutional responsibility

for curricular design was not at odds with this tradition. The dispute was not resolved however, and would come up in the debate again at a later point.

In line with the implementation policy outlined in their first discussion paper, the ministry left institutions the choice between a) conserving existing programmes; and b) integrating existing programmes into a new course offer leading to the *licence* and *mastaire*, respectively. However, the ministry precluded the parallel maintenance of the old and the new system within one disciplinary area in a single institution. It also made it compulsory to introduce ECTS, modularisation, and internal teaching evaluation.

The initial reform aim to bridge the gap between universities and *grandes écoles* featured only as a side aspect in the ministerial documents of 2001, but this does not mean that it was abandoned. In a colloquium on "the university and professionalisation", Lang reinforced the intention of the ministry to overcome the divide between universities and *grandes écoles*, which he also saw as a divide between the humanities and the technical subjects, and between academic and professional knowledge (Lang, 2001a). As I later show, the creation of the *diplôme de mastaire* would prove to be a key instrument of the ministry in extending its influence over the *grandes écoles*.

In autumn and winter 2001, the ministerial reform plans were successively formalised in a series of draft decrees which were discussed with stakeholders, first informally and individually, then formally in the CNESER. With one exception, all these decrees passed the CNESER with a positive majority, though most were opposed by SNESUP and UNEF.

The decrees that had been prepared so carefully for more than a year were ultimately passed in a complete rush in April 2002 to ensure that they would become effective before the change from the socialist government under Jospin, to the new conservative government of prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, which resulted from the presidential elections at the end of April 2002. Some of the decrees were even passed between the two ballots, in the middle of the transition period between the two governments.[241] The set of decrees has to be understood in conjunction, as they build an ensemble.

Fixing a purely terminological but important deficit in the regulation of 1999, the first decree (Décret no 2002-480, 2002) retrospectively modified the spelling of the title *mastaire* in the previous decrees (on the creation of the *grade de mastaire*

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[241] What actually happened was that prime minister Jospin had decided to run in the presidential election on 21 April 2002 against current president Jacques Chirac as well as the right-wing populist Jean-Marie Le Pen. When he lost the first ballot to both candidates, coming behind Le Pen's 17% with 16% of the votes, he immediately stepped back from office. His ministers did remain in charge until the new government was installed however. On 5 May 2002, Chirac won over Le Pen and appointed Raffarin as prime minister for a transition period until the parliamentary elections scheduled for 9 June. In these elections the Raffarin government was confirmed in office.

and on the creation of the Helfer Commission) and all ensuing national regulation. In the preface to the decree, the new orthography '*grade de master*' was justified as "not very French, but more common internationally". Ironically, this 'minor' detail turned out to be highly disputed, and this decree was the only one that did not find a majority in the CNESER. While the protection of the *master* by patent law that had constituted the reason for the initial evasion to the title *mastaire* had proved to be unfounded, the transition to 'English terminology' evoked strong feelings in the French public and even triggered a case before the *Conseil d'État*, the highest advisory body in French legislation procedures. The ministry did however 'win' the case.

The second decree (Décret no 2002-481, 2002) formally defined the architecture for the new degree structure of French HE. It defined the four qualification levels *baccalaureat*, *licence*, *master* and *doctorat* as *grades* "referring to the main European levels of reference", and the intermediary levels as *titres*, such as DEUG and *maîtrise*. Finally, it defined the *diplôme national* as "any diploma delivered under state authority (…) conferring the same rights to all holders". Importantly, it reserved the right to carry *grades* for holders of a *diplôme national*. Moreover, it formally established the principle of periodic re-accreditation (*habilitation*) of degrees, and conferred the ministry in charge of HE the task to ensure the overall coherence and readability of the French HE degree structure. While this regulation may not seem surprising in light of the previous discussion, it contained a tricky detail: it extended its influence over the *grandes écoles* by conferring the overall responsibility for the coherence of the system to the ministry responsible for HE, confining the right to carry *grades* to holders of a *diplôme national*, and making the *diplôme national* dependent upon periodic *habilitation* by the ministry. The existing policy that qualifications of *grandes écoles* had to pass either the CTI or the Helfer Commission to earn the entitlement to the *grade de master* was now given a stronger regulatory basis. As I show in the next section, this decree laid the basis for important future developments.

The third decree (Décret no 2002-482, 2002) provided the framework for the intended curricular reforms, "allowing HEIs to innovate by organising new degree programmes" (Art. 1). It contained the regulatory frame for the introduction of a semester system and modularisation (referred to as *unités d'enseignement)*, ECTS, and the diploma supplement (referred to as *annexe descriptive au diplôme*) (Art. 2). Furthermore, it expressed an entire set of curricular reform ambitions such as organising degree programmes into 'tracks', creating multi-disciplinary programmes, improving the quality of teaching and student guidance, recognising prior learning, increasing the practical orientation of studies (*professionalisation*), encouraging student mobility, integrating key skills, and using ICT (Art. 3). All these reforms were presented as the "application of the European HE area to the French HE system".

By defining the three major reference levels of French HE as *licence, master*, and *doctorat* (abbreviated as "LMD") and not in terms of number of years but ECTS

credits (180+120+180), the ministry in charge of HE left behind the reference to the new degree structure as "3/5/8". The rationale behind this shift of terminology was that "LMD" allowed for more flexibility in terms of the length of studies up to each of the levels, and was more in line with a competence-based approach. Nevertheless, deviations from the standard length of three years up to the *licence*, two more years up to the *master*, and three more years up to the *doctorat* were not a major issue in the French debate.[242] This set of decrees was complemented by a series of *arrêtés* specifying the re-design of particular education levels according to the new framework.

The first *arrêté* (*Arrêté licence*, 2002) related to all university studies leading towards the *grade de licence*. The workload was defined as 180 ECTS credits or six semesters, and new avenues were opened for organising integrated programmes up to that level. Universities were encouraged to make use of the concept of 'tracks' which could be "mono-disciplinary, bi-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, of general, applied or professional orientation" (Art. 15), and to organise undergraduate studies according to the major-minor system. The existing qualifications up to the *licence* were not abolished but could be maintained as intermediate *diplômes,* and so was the *licence professionelle.* The *arrêté* included a whole list of further wishes regarding the curricular renewal of the first years of university studies such as the development of teaching teams; improved student advice and tutoring in the early years; a course design that would allow for students' gradual orientation; the diversification of teaching modes and learning paths including group work, projects, internships, and distance learning; and more attention to the teaching of foreign language and IT skills. These regulations integrated proposals put forward by the teaching and learning commission of the CPU (*commission de la pédagogie et de la formation*). The *arrêté* adapted the possibilities for the *capitalisation* and *compensation* to ECTS and the semester system. It rendered the institutional evaluation of teaching and learning compulsory, and specified the rules for the regular re-*habilitation* of programmes. Finally, it created the regulatory basis for the set-up of a national commission responsible for the formative evaluation of the reform of the *licence* (*comité de suivi licence*).

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[242] Two more decrees applied to the HE sector the new possibilities opened by the "social modernisation law" (*loi de modernisation sociale*) from January 2002 for the recognition of prior learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience*). In principle, the law made it possible to obtain an HE degree without prior studies, based on the evaluation of the required competences by a HEI. The first decree focused on the recognition of student achievements in France and abroad to facilitate student mobility nationally and internationally. The second focused on the recognition of previous professional experience. It reduced the minimum requirement of professional experience taken into account from five to three years, and included unpaid as well as voluntary social work (Décret no 2002-529, 2002; Décret no 2002-590, 2002).

The second *arrêté* concerned the creation of a new *diplôme national de master* (DNM) (Arrêté master, 2002). The level was fixed at 120 ECTS credits or four semesters on top of a *licence,* which could have either have a professional or a research orientation (*master professionnel* or *master recherche*, henceforth referred to as professional and research Masters programme*)*.[243] Similar to the *licence*, previous qualifications at this level (*maîtrise,* DESS, DEA) were not abolished and a transition period was granted for the integration of programmes such as MSG, MIAGE, and those offered by the IUPs. The *arrêté* entitled holders of the *licence* to pursue their studies up to level '*bac*+4' (i.e., the first 60 credits of the *master*, corresponding to the former *maîtrise*), thus preserving student entitlements regarding access. The definition of the two profiles, research and professional, resonated the previous DESS and DEA. But now a common "trunk" of studies up to the level of the former *maîtrise* was envisaged, allowing for more flexible student orientation in the course of the Masters phase. Mastery of a foreign language was defined as a formal requirement for achieving the DNM.

Art. 15 opened the possibility for *grandes écoles*, including engineering schools, to offer the DNM. For these programmes the DNM was defined as "certifying a high level of professional competence", accounting for the weak research capacities of some *grandes écoles*. This entitlement was in principle made subject to the same quality assurance requirements as university degrees, namely the periodic re-*évaluation* by a national commission. The specific modalities for each sector were left to further regulation. This provision accounted for the particular interest of engineering schools to offer special professional Masters programmes for foreigners in addition to their traditional programmes, which had proven difficult to access for foreign students. In May 2003, the Duby Commission would be created to accredit these programmes.[244] Art. 15 was the result of difficult negotiations with representatives of the *grandes écoles* and the university side. For the *grandes écoles*, formally submitting their programmes to the quality control of the ministry in charge of HE was a big step. For the universities, accepting that *grandes écoles* would be able to grant the same degrees as them was a novelty. Another difficulty was that a range of *grandes écoles* had already started to offer 'Masters' degrees prior to the reform, and these were now to be brought under a common regime.

Finally, this *arrêté* also created the regulatory basis for the set-up of a national commission responsible for the formative evaluation of the new DNM (*comité de suivi master*), similar to the one for the *licence*, though this would not happen until May 2003. They were composed of representatives of universities, *grandes écoles*,

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[243] A supplementary *arrêté* of 25 April adapted the decree n° 99-747 of 30 August 1999 on the "creation of the *grade de master*" to include the *diplôme de master* in the list of qualifications entitled to the *grade de master*.

[244] By the start of the academic year 2003/04, the first 52 *master* programmes in engineering were submitted and 15 accepted.

and the CNESER and would provide an important forum for actor involvement and constructive participation in ongoing policy formulation, allowing for grass-roots feedback.[245]

8.3.5   Ongoing policy formulation during transition and some difficulties

In May 2002, Luc Ferry—a high profile intellectual and philosophy professor—was appointed as education minister of the new conservative government. This appointment was viewed controversially in the HE community and the general public. While Ferry was a self-proclaimed "liberal democrat" and not a member of a political party, he was still clearly associated with the conservative camp (Bronner, Phelippeau, & Weill, 2002; McLemee, 2002). Generally, conservative governments in France were perceived as more antagonistic with the HE sector than socialist governments, potentially creating a higher level of conflict. With respect to the reform of the degree structure now commonly referred to as "LMD" however, the conservatives fully kept the course set by the previous socialist government. Musselin (2005: 3) stresses that this "stability" across governments and political camps was unusual and surprising in the light of experience with other HE reform in France; and could among other things, be attributed to the "uninterrupted presence" of a small team of high-level bureaucrats in the DES. During the first months of Ferry's term of office the continuity of reforms was maintained by the head of the HE department, Demichel, who stayed on with her administrative team until the end of July when she was followed by Jean-Marc Monteil.

This section traces the developments under Luc Ferry's term of office, from May 2002 to March 2004. The period was characterised by the actual adoption of the new degree structure by a large number of universities, and framed by the *habilitation* processes of autumn 2003 and autumn 2004 (the preparation for the next round usually started a full year in advance). The ministry led these *habilitation* processes through detailed policy guidelines transmitted by circular letters that constituted an important soft regulatory tool, but also through intense policy dialogue. National-level policy formulation continued throughout the implementation process, and experience with implementation fed back into these policies. A range of disputed aspects of the reform, notably access to the Masters

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[245] A third *arrêté* concerned the reform of doctoral studies, providing the regulatory basis of the creation of multi-disciplinary research teams that would assume responsibility for the education of future researchers (*écoles doctorales*), and integrating this structure with the new research master (*Arrêté écoles doctorales*, 2002). Finally, a decree "regarding the remuneration of education services proposed by public HEIs in the framework of their mission of international cooperation" allowed for public funding of HEIs' international activities, improving incentives for such endeavours (Décret no 2002-654, 2002).

level and the increased curricular diversity, only became real political issues in the course of these years and led to confrontation with student and academic staff unions such as UNEF and SNESUP. This was further heightened by Ferry's initiative to attempt a wider reform of the National HE Act. It was concentrated on the adaptation of steering and governance mechanisms and the anchoring of the new degree structure was actually only a very minor aspect. Nevertheless, in the perception of some unions these reforms melted into a single project and caused fierce opposition. In March 2004, Ferry would ultimately resign over this conflict. I now trace these developments in more detail.

8.3.5.1 Preparing the first habilitation process

Towards the end of June 2002, the ministry published a circular to prepare the consultation with HEIs on the *habilitation* process for the academic year 2003/04 (MEN, 2002c), backed up by an explanatory letter (MEN, 2002b). The circular constituted the first application of the decrees of April 2002. As of autumn 2003 and through the following *habilitation* processes of 2004, 2005, and 2006; the universities of the respective group covered by the contract policy in that year would have the choice of submitting their programme offer according to the new decrees or sticking to the traditional framework.

The circular made clear however, that a few aspects of the reform were compulsory; in any case, institutions had to structure their course offering according to 'domains' (see section 8.3.4 for a definition) and demonstrate how this related to their overall strategy. If an institution opted for the application of the new regulation, the ministry ruled that old and new degrees could not coexist within a single domain. Institutions also had to apply ECTS, develop "real teaching teams", account for professionalisation, and integrate the teaching of key skills; notably foreign languages and information technology (MEN, 2002c). Curricula should be supportive of diversified learning paths and progressive student orientation. For *licence* programmes, institutions had to ensure student achievement; for Masters programmes they had to demonstrate how these were based on existing research capacities (*poles de competence*). Finally, they had to set up an internal system of teaching and learning self-evaluation. To expedite the transition, the ministry announced that no new DEUST and MST programmes would be authorised and new DESS and IUP programmes would be subject to special scrutiny. The DEUG and *maîtrise* would continue to be awarded but only upon individual request by a student. *Licence professionelle* programmes would be integrated into the overall *habilitation* process, but would continue to be evaluated by a separate commission. The MSU that had so far evaluated the quality of academic research at universities in general (see section 8.2.3 on 'curricular governance') was to be replaced by a new group, the *mission scientifique, technique et pédagogique* (MSTP), which would now also scrutinise research-oriented

graduate programmes, including the new research and professional Masters programmes and *écoles doctorales*. The MSTP was ultimately created in 2003.

Jean-Marc Monteil, who succeeded Demichel as head of the DES in July, did not significantly change the course set by her. From July to November 2002, Monteil consulted his reform approach with HEIs, preparing his version of the circular on the *habilitation* process 2003 which he published in November (MEN, 2002d).

In early October 2002, Ferry outlined his policy on LMD in a press conference titled "Adapting our HE to Europe and the world" (Ferry, 2002). In his speech he confirmed the course of reforms, but also added a few new aspects. First, he suggested rolling out the possibility for IUTs to offer programmes at level *bac*+3 and for IUT students to continue their studies beyond that level. Second, he proposed to strengthen general studies (*culture générale*) in the first years of university education. By this measure, he wanted to continue efforts to broaden the curriculum; this time by involving the disciplines themselves in opening up to each other (*décloisonnement*), based on the conviction that relevant general education needed to be part of disciplinary education. Third, at the Masters level he intended to give increased attention to ensuring that the quality of any programme was guaranteed and that they were *only* offered in areas of proven academic competence of the respective institution. Different from what Allègre had once envisaged, Ferry had the aim that "in some time, only the Masters should exist among the university programmes, structured into a professional and a research track" (ibid: Le master). He also raised the question of selection upon entry to the Masters level for the first time. Even if he did not give an answer, this constituted a new step in policy formulation as the topic had so far been taboo.

By the start of the academic year 2002/03, three universities in the North of France (Artois, Lille 2, and Valenciennes, all of the 2002 group D) decided to change to the LMD structure on an experimental basis, a year ahead of the first regular group scheduled to do so. This development reflected the eagerness of French universities to make the transition, which was based on their perception that they needed to reform in order to compete in the European HE area, and that a speedy implementation would constitute a competitive advantage vis-à-vis other universities.

In November 2002, the ministry published the ultimate ministerial circular on the implementation of the LMD scheme for the *habilitation* process 2003, but also addressed to universities[246] of the later groups (MEN, 2002d). A few weeks later,

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[246] The *habilitation* process under the contract policy mainly concerned the universities, including the *Instituts Nationals Polytechniques* (INPs), a type of engineering schools that were also CPU members. Additionally, it also covered a range of other institutions under the authority of the ministry in charge of HE, such as the so-called *grands établissements* and the teacher training colleges (IUFM). For simplicity, I include them in the term 'university'. Whenever I give numbers,

in mid-January 2003, HEIs of the 2003 group A had to submit their projects for the academic year 2003/04. All 14 HEIs of that group decided to make the transition. Generally, the circular continued the course set by the previous circular but specified a number of points and set a few new directions.

Though HEIs still formally had the choice of whether to move to LMD, the phrasing in this circular was more insistent, asking universities "to specify their degree of engagement in the scheme LMD and the proposed time schedule for implementation". The underlying philosophy to increase curricular autonomy was justified with reference to international customs: "to allow French universities to propose their programmes and degrees as done by all important universities in the world" (ibid: preface). The ministry explained that it was a conscious choice not to "impose a national nomenclature of domains", but let HEIs come up with their own proposals (ibid: 1.2—*critères de cohérence globale*). It indicated that the overall coherence of the course offering would be an important criterion for the evaluation by DES, as well as the complementarity of the offering in a specific region. Finally, disciplinary evaluation of the research capacity by the newly created MSTP would also play an important role (ibid: 2—*Les modalités organisationnelles et pratiques*), particularly for graduate programmes. This aspect followed from the call for increased attention to the research base of university programmes announced by Ferry in his agenda-setting speech (Ferry, 2002). The evaluation criteria were now much more specific than in the earlier circular by Demichel and included curricular details. This was justified by two reasons: the principle of the *diplôme national* and the need for mutual acceptance and trust of accreditation regimes within Europe.

Regarding Masters programmes, the circular imposed the following specific criteria: any programme, whether research or professional, had to be based on the proven research capacity of academic staff. Professional Masters programmes required additional involvement of qualified practitioners. The joint offer of Masters programmes with other institutions was explicitly encouraged (*cohabilitation*). Three curricular schemes were proposed: Y, V and T, referring to the point at which differentiation of students into a research and a professional track would take place.[247] The tensions between the new possibilities for an integrated curricular design of the two-year Masters phase and the unchanged regulations for selection after the first 60 credits (*maîtrise*) remained unsolved, and

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I only refer to CPU member institutions. Any information provided in this chapter on the number of universities making the transition at particular points in time is based on CPU data (CPU, 2005b).

[247] The Y-version contained a 'common trunk' which would normally take the first 60 credits, but could also be longer or shorter. The V-version was differentiated into a professional and a research track from the beginning. The T-Version was an integrated programme where the professional versus research character depended on individual student choice, such as the type of internship they undertook.

were delayed into the implementation phase. Moreover, the political decision not to review the selection point led to the perpetuation of traditional degrees at the level of *maîtrise* (such as MST, MSG, IUP) under cover of the new framework.[248] These provisions did not improve the permeability between programme types.

Regarding *licence* programmes, the circular encouraged the broadening of curricula (*culture générale*) and the strengthening of scientific and technological education. In that context, DEUST programmes were again supported and the contribution of the IUTs was also seen favourably. The ministry did not accept the demand by the IUTs for a *licence technologique* however. The competence of the CNE to accredit *licence professionelle* projects was extended to all professionally-oriented *licence* programmes.

Autumn 2002 saw the first effort of student organisations to mobilise resistance against the new degree structure. The protests did however not spread beyond three non-Parisian universities as the effects of reform were not yet sufficiently clear (Dubois, 2003). In December, the ministry issued a press release in response to a joint communiqué from a number of student and academic staff unions (FCPE, 2002; MEN, 2002a). These developments were indicative of mounting controversy over the way LMD was translated into policies, particularly the involvement of stakeholders and the perceived threat to the *diplôme national*. Other criticism arose from the fear of suppression of the DEUG and the *maîtrise*, the introduction of student selection upon entry to the Masters programmes, and the introduction of an "American model" (Davidenkoff, 2003a).

8.3.5.2 Early 2003 to March 2004: a mounting level of controversy

The end of Ferry's term of office from early 2003 to March 2004 was characterised by an increasingly messy reform process and a mounting level of disagreement, even if only a limited number of national actors were involved in the actual dispute—basically a few student and academic staff unions.[249] Nevertheless, the course of events presented in this section indicates that a range of difficulties and debated issues only emerged clearly at the national level when the first two regular groups of universities prepared their transition to the new degree structure. In spring 2003, tensions were increased by Ferry's initiative to attempt a comprehensive reform of the National HE Act. Different actors started voicing

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[248] The teacher training of IUFMs was also not integrated, but should remain focused on preparing students for the *concours*.

[249] In characterising this phase of the process by a mounting level of disagreement, it should be kept in mind that compared to other HE reform projects in French HE, the move to a two-cycle degree structure in France in general actually took place in a surprisingly smooth way (Musselin, 2005). However, compared to the previous phases of the reform and the way policy formulation on the two-cycle structure took place in other countries, the assessment seems fair.

their positions in national position papers. In the following, I will summarise these debates.

In February 2003, the CPU (2003b) published a key position paper titled "European harmonisation: LMD system", which confirmed their strong support of the reform and, somewhat indirectly, raised a number of critical points. For example, the CPU stressed their attachment to the concept of the *diplôme national*, thereby hinting that it might be endangered. They also recalled the need for a definition of degree titles denoting subject specifications (*denominations*) at the national level, alluding to confusion in this area. They voiced concern about the coherence between *licence* and *master* programmes linked to the reorganisation of studies in 'domains', anticipating complications regarding the access of students to *master* programmes if the *licence* degrees were not clearly delineated. The selection of issues shows that the new freedom granted to HEIs constituted a real challenge and was hard to reconcile with the aim of national coherence and the tradition of focussed, discipline-specific programmes. The CPU also highlighted their intention to fully integrate the programmes and staff teams of IUTs and IUPs and of special programmes like MST and MSG into universities, thus using the transition to LMD to overcome internal segmentation and redundancy. While the ministry shared this intention, it was in conflict with the interests of IUTs and IUPs. At a more general level, the paper made clear that in the eyes of the CPU "the LMD system" did not only stand for a reformed degree structure, but for an entire reform package including "European harmonisation, visibility of universities, readability of programmes, reorganisation of programmes into semesters, increased student mobility, and the principle of capitalisation" (ibid). For the CPU, these were European aims which were complemented by two specifically French concerns, namely the move to more student-centred teaching methods and the move from a logic of pre-defined degree programmes to a logic of flexible tracks (from *filière* to *parcours*). Their members' support of the reform was confirmed by a CPU survey from April 2003, which found that of the 50 universities that had responded, predominantly from the first two groups, 45 intended to move completely and five partly to LMD (CPU, 2003c).

The place and role of the IUTs in the new degree structure remained an issue of debate in the coming months. Indicative of negotiations behind the scenes, in March 2003 the ministry published a communiqué issued by a joint ADIUT – CPU working group on the role of IUTs in the provision of *licence professionelle* programmes (MEN, 2003d). It confirmed the importance and strong role of IUTs in this area, but excluded uncoordinated advances of IUTs, stressing that these programmes should always be developed in cooperation between IUTs and other university departments. As opposed to the original conception, half of the 750 *licence professionelle* programmes that started in the academic year 2003/04 were implemented within IUTs (MEN, 2003c).

A similar debate ensued in November 2003 over the place and role of the IUPs in the new degree structure. The problem was that both their traditional entry

and exit points did not fit with the LMD structure; their student intake was traditionally after one to two years of studies, leading to the *ingénieur-maître* at level *bac*+4. Moreover, both the universities and the ministry shared the interest to integrate the IUPs into the universities. IUPs and employers on the other hand, were concerned not only to preserve the professionally-oriented programmes, but also the institutional structures they had built up over recent years. On 12 November, the CPU published a position paper presenting their view on the role of IUPs in LMD; they assured that the existence of IUPs was not threatened, that they regarded their experience and educational method as valuable, that universities would offer the additional 60 credits needed after an *ingénieur-maître* to reach the *master*, and that it would show on the degree certificate that the respective programme had been passed in an IUP (CPU, 2003a). On 19 November, the ministry published a press release to outline how the "misunderstanding" between them, the CPU, and the IUPs had been solved: the course offering of the IUPs would be fully integrated into the new degree structure, implying that they would move to the 3+2-structure and henceforth offer professional Masters programmes at level *bac*+5. Universities would have to take care that their *licence* programmes not only prepared for their own, but also for IUP Masters programmes. The funding for IUPs would remain unchanged (MEN, 2003b).

In May 2003, Ferry made the first major political advance of his period in office by publicising a draft amendment of the national HE law—later referred to as "university modernisation law" (*loi de modernisation universitaire*). Given the strong emotions traditionally associated with changes to the national HE law, which had not been touched since 1984, this was an extremely ambitious project. It was however, fully supported by the CPU. The main impetus was to increase the financial and personnel autonomy of universities while at the same time strengthening their accountability, implying an adjustment of the state–university relationship (Musselin, 2003). This included introducing a global budget for HEIs, increasing their flexibility to define the tasks of academics, and facilitating cooperation and mergers of adjacent HEIs, as well as between HEIs and regional authorities. A side aspect of the reform was to anchor the new LMD degree structure, so far only regulated by decrees, in the law.

Ferry's plans immediately met the fierce opposition of unions in the academic sector such as UNEF and SNESUP, this time also including the more temperate *La Fage* and the presidents of some smaller universities. Although the main criticism concerned the governance aspects of the reform and not LMD, the latter came to be perceived as part and parcel of an encompassing 'neo-liberal' project. Student and academic staff unions made a connection between the changes in university governance and the changes of curricular governance (through the reform of the *habilitation* process); they saw both as "an extremely dangerous project aiming to establish competition between institutions according to a very liberal concept" (A SNESUP representative in Bronner & Laronche, 2003). Again, the main criticism

concerning LMD was that it supposedly challenged the concept of the *diplôme national* "by allowing universities to define the content and organisation of their programmes" (ibid). Another concern was that free access to the Masters level might be endangered.

Given the strong political resistance, Ferry had to postpone the presentation of the draft amendment to the Council of Ministers to autumn (Gurrey, Jolly, & Laronche, 2003). The government was already in trouble over pension reform at the time, and did not want to risk an additional conflict over HE. Ferry was presented as "increasingly fragile" by the media (*Le Monde*, 2003).

Despite these tensions, the implementation of the new degree structure proceeded. During the summer of 2003, the first group of universities prepared to launch their reformed programmes by the start of the academic year 2003/04. A seminar organised in July by AMUE[250] on "the implementation of LMD in the French universities" (AMUE, 2003b) highlighted some of the problems in the transition to LMD. Monteil, the director of the HE department, deplored the "extreme diversity" of the proposals submitted to the ministry for *habilitation*, again grappling with the wish to maintain the principle of the *diplôme national* (AMUE, 2003a). Again, the balance between increased curricular autonomy of universities and national coherence was a major issue. Another theme was the quality of submitted programmes, which according to Monteil, should be guaranteed by either resting on solid academic or professional ground. Further challenges for HEIs were the need to develop 'teaching teams' of the same quality and seriousness as the established 'research teams', as well as creating multi-disciplinary programmes. By the start of the academic year 2003/04, 14 HEIs followed the three pioneering universities of 2002 in switching to the LMD structure.

In September 2003, the ministry published a circular on the *habilitation* process 2004 (MEN, 2003a), giving more detailed instructions to the second regular group of HEIs (*vague* B) that would make the transition to LMD in the next autumn. The topics of the circular indicated the difficulties of the current group. Among others, the circular recalled the following aims: the use of ECTS, the development of tracks and transition paths, the support of students' progressive orientation, the obligation of internal evaluation, and the need for strategic planning. A key issue was the concept of the 'domain', which was once more explained and specified in terms of the triad *domaine – mention – spécialité*, roughly translated as "domain – discipline or interdisciplinary field of studies[251] – specialisation", for example "science and technology – physics – quantum physics". The explanations meant to alleviate problems of institutions to distinguish the three categories. The

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[250] *Agence de mutualisation des universités et établissements*—an agency set up by the CPU to provide technical and organisational support to HEIs on questions of HE reform and promote the exchange of experience.

[251] The ministry highlighted that a *mention* could also cut across traditional disciplines.

ministry also recalled the better integration of DUT and *licence professionelle* programmes into the overall provision at *licence* level. In this context, it stressed that integrated three-year *licence professionelle* programmes were not desired. Entry to a *licence professionelle* should normally be after the first two years, possibly also after one year. At the Masters level, the ministry redefined IUP qualifications as worth 120 credits and starting after a *licence*, which implied abandoning the *ingénieur-maître*. It also sought to exclude Masters programmes serving exclusively to prepare for competitive exams for the entry of the public service (*concours*). For research Masters programmes, the ministry recommended their integration into *écoles doctorales*. It promoted intra- and inter-institutional cooperation in the provision of degrees in order to build stronger and more visible centres of excellence (*cohabilitations* and *politique de site*), and particularly encouraged the cooperation of *grandes écoles* with universities in the provision of research Masters programmes.

For universities that chose not to make the transition, the ministry ruled that they were only allowed to prolong existing programmes, thus increasing the pressure to shift to the new system. Furthermore, HEIs would now have to explicitly apply for the right to offer the *maîtrise* and DEUG as intermediary qualifications.

In the technical annex, the ministry announced that engineering schools which wanted to offer research Masters programmes would be submitted to the same *habilitation* procedure as universities.[252] This constituted a further step beyond the current arrangement of the Duby Commission towards the submission of Masters programmes in engineering under the direct quality control of the state.

The months of November and December 2003 were characterised by another wave of student protests against the reform of degree structures referred to as "LMD". This was triggered by the coincidence of two developments: the implementation of the new degree structure in the first group of universities and Ferry's second effort to push through the "modernisation law" which he had postponed in early summer. This time however, the protests spread throughout the entire country and ultimately led to Ferry's fall in March 2004. On 21 November, Luc Ferry announced that he would maintain his plan to fundamentally overhaul the HE law and that the essence of his project would remain unchanged. He planned to present the draft amendment to Parliament in June 2004 after three months of consultation with the sector. While the CPU supported Ferry by stressing the "absolute need for a reform" (Davidenkoff, 2003b), the UNEF immediately mobilised opposition against it. One day after his announcement, 17 universities had entered into strike (Bronner, 2003b). Although the anchoring of the new degree structure in the education act was only a side

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[252] Regarding the authorisation of the professional *master* programmes of engineering schools, the ministry announced a further notice.

aspect of the modernisation law, it provided the occasion for a massive campaign by the UNEF against "LMD".

The UNEF accused the government that "under the cover of a desirable European harmonisation, the LMD reform puts into question the value of our *diplômes* and the equality of students" (Bronner, 2003b). The three main points of criticism put forward by the UNEF were not new, but now they were taken up by the media: the threat to the *diplôme national*, the fear of student selection upon entry to the Masters level, and reduced possibilities for *compensation* of grades between semesters.[253] Additional fears were the abolition of rehearsal exams at the end of a semester, the introduction of student fees and a general trend towards privatisation of HE. While the latter two issues were as such unrelated to the LMD reform, UNEF linked them in the debate and saw the different developments in HE—from the European debate on the general agreement on trade in services (GATS) through Ferry's intention to increase the autonomy of French universities to LMD—as parts of the same overall trend. Other student unions like *La Fage* and the PDE supported the LMD reform, and PDE even stated that the points raised by the UNEF were "but lies spread to better mobilise students" (Davidenkoff, 2003b). According to an article by Bronner (2003a), "the left is divided" over this reform—traditionally favouring European cooperation, but equally traditionally opposing liberalisation.

In a press release from November 24, the minister defended his plans against the students' allegations regarding LMD, clarifying that "in this context, there will be neither selection upon entry to the university, nor a modification of the fee regime, nor suppression of the *diplôme national* (*bac*+2 and *bac*+4) which remain intact, nor will French universities be put into competition among each other." He continued to explain that "not only no 'privatisation' or 'regionalisation' is envisaged, but to the contrary, our *diplôme national* will be more national than ever and the mobility of students within France will be eased" (MEN, 2003e). He also clarified that the formal reform of the modernisation law had not even been formulated yet. These explanations however, did little to calm student resistance. While it was true that student selection upon entry to the Masters level was not (yet) part of any formal regulation, it was equally true that the logic of the new degree structure pointed in this direction, so that student fears were not completely unfounded in this regard. Similarly, while it was true that the *diplôme national* was formally kept, it was also true that curricular diversity under this label had increased. This was different for the critique of privatisation and student fees, which was without any empirical base. Also, the critique of the UNEF overlooked the strong efforts to improve the quality of HE that were part of LMD.

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[253] UNEF feared that the possibilities for the *compensation* of grades between two semesters, which had been made possible by the Bayrou reform to fight drop-out, would be lost in the new system.

On 24 and 27 November, the CPU entered the public debate with strong arguments in favour of the LMD reform, recalling that university councils—including student representatives—had largely voted in favour; that LMD was meant to strengthen, not weaken the public service; and stating that student protests were based on false allegations (although the CPU also recalled the need for adequate funding) (Court, 2003; CPU, 2003d).

However, the fact that the debate had already left the level of direct dialogue and taken the form of a confrontation in the media indicated the fading base for a consensus between the government and unions. On 1 December, 27 universities were "on strike against LMD" (Becquet, Brion, Lemai, Ponpon, & Wolf, 2004). The ministry's efforts to reinstall a basis for discussion with students (Becquet et al., 2004) were not successful. When the regional elections in March 2004 showed fading support for the government, Raffarin saw the need to exchange disputed ministers in his cabinet; one of them was Ferry. Ultimately, he fell over his attempt to reform the HE act. On 31 March 2004, Ferry was succeeded by the then minister of social affairs, work and solidarity, François Fillon as new education minister.

8.3.6   Calming the waters and continuing reform

This section traces the developments during Fillon's term of office. Under Fillon, who had been minister in charge of HE before (1993 - 1995), the waters calmed quickly. Fillon abandoned the disputed reform of the HE Act, but maintained the reform of degree structures (Bronner, 2004). In a speech before the CPU on April 22, Fillon based the continuation of the LMD reform on the argument that it was "based on international objectives which are hardly disputable" and "allows for positive developments at national level". He saw LMD as a means to reconcile the requirements of massification with the need to foster excellence and attractiveness through the organisation of studies in two main cycles. As a former minister of labour, he stressed the opportunities offered by the new degree structure for strengthening lifelong learning (Fillon, 2004). Given that he did not pursue the disputed "modernisation law", UNEF and SNESUP ended their protests and returned to a working relationship with the ministry.

The next months were characterised by a series of constructive contributions from the sector which showed that the reform had now reached the level of very concrete implementation details. Notably, the follow-up committees on *licence* and *master* published the results of their first year of consultation. These recommendations did not have the formal weight of regulations, but as they reflected a broad consensus in the HE sector, they had an important informal orientation function. A first set of four recommendations was made public by the ministry at the beginning of June (MEN, 2004e). They concerned the registration of all professionally-oriented degrees in a national register, the research

component of Masters degrees, the conditions for the joint delivery of degrees by different HEIs (*cohabilitation*), and the implementation of the diploma supplement, including sample forms for *licence* and *master* (*Comité de suivi de la licence et du master*, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d).

Shortly after, the two committees published more specific recommendations regarding the design of *licence* and *master* programmes. The recommendation on the *licence* concentrated on the creation of multi-disciplinary programmes.[254] It clarified that a 'domain' was by definition multi-disciplinary and should organise the dialogue between colleagues of different disciplines *(Comité de suivi de la licence*, 2004b*)*. The recommendation on the Masters level covered the pertinent distinction between "*domaine – mention – spécialité*", the transition from *licence* to Masters programmes, the question of degree titles in relation to the *habilitation* process, and the *habilitation* of joint degrees (*Comité de suivi master*, 2004). The instructions regarding the distinction between "*domaine – mention – spécialité*" responded to the lasting difficulties of HEIs with structuring their educational provision along 'domains' and thinking beyond the disciplinary boundaries. Coherence of 'domains' between HEIs was also still an issue. The instructions regarding the transition from the first to the second cycle reflected problems with the permeability between the two phases, particularly for students changing HEIs. The paper called for an effort to overcome narrow disciplinary thinking in defining entry criteria for Masters programmes. It highlighted tensions between the regulation (*arrêté* on the *diplôme national de master* from 2002) and envisaged selection *within* Masters programmes (after the former *maîtrise*) and their curricular coherence. The paper also responded to obvious confusion around the question of what information should appear on degree certificates (the 'domain', the '*mention*', or also the area of 'specialisation'?), and called for keeping the terminology simple and understandable. In this regard, it asked the ministry to publish a list with accredited degrees – indicating that the diversity of degree titles had led to the feeling that the *diplôme national* had been weakened.[255]

Towards the end of June, the CPU, CDEFI, and CGE (2004) published a joint declaration in support of the European HE area as a common frame of reference. It had an important symbolic value, because it was the first time that these three largest—and traditionally quite antagonistic—representative organisation of HEIs

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[254] The paper distinguished between the principles of 'multi-disciplinarity' and 'inter-disciplinarity', defining the latter as the creation of a new disciplinary field by the interaction of several disciplines. Multi-disciplinary programmes should support the student in constructing an individual professional perspective (*project professionnel)* and could be implemented by means of a major-minor structure.

[255] Regarding the joint delivery of degrees, the paper demonstrated a unique French perspective where the encouragement of cooperation in the provision of degrees between French HEIs was an important part of the reform; consequently international joint and double degree programmes were seen through the same lens and were thus much less of an oddity than in other countries.

joined hands in support of the Bologna process. Moreover, they recognised and welcomed the convergence of universities and *grandes écoles*, which they characterised as a process in which universities were strengthening their education's professional orientation and the *grandes écoles* their research capacity. All types of HEIs recognised the need for a strong link between teaching, research, and innovation as well as for increased autonomy, and promised to strengthen cooperation.

At the end of August, the ministry published a circular with instructions on the *habilitation* process 2005 (MEN, 2004a), opening the transition of the third group of HEIs to the new degree structure. It began by noting that three quarters of HEIs had already made the transition to LMD, but that creating a coherent and readable programme supply remained a challenge. The ministry further increased its insistence regarding implementation: HEIs which did not intend to convert their programme supply to LMD could now only get the *habilitation* of their existing programmes extended by one year. While the last two circulars remained valid, the ministry clarified a few points. It once more interpreted the concept of '*domaine – mention – specialité*', explaining that the 'domain' was multi-disciplinary, the *mention* generally disciplinary, and the *specialité* sub-disciplinary. HEIs were asked to refrain from the definition of a *spécialité* at the level of the *licence* in order to prevent overspecialisation. The need to base the educational provision on research capacity was again stressed, as was the need for a better integration of IUTs. They were repeatedly asked to cooperate better in the provision of the *licence professionelle* and to open possibilities for DEUG holders to enter into these programmes; ultimately, this was what they had been created for. IUPs on the other hand, should now be fully integrated into universities. Building on the previous recommendation by the follow-up commission on the *master* (*Comité de suivi master*, 2004), the ministry introduced a distinction between the 'joint delivery of degrees' (*cohabilitation/habilitation conjointe*) based on common teaching teams, equal contributions and real complementarity; and 'simple partnership' meaning that only one of the two partners was authorised (through *habilitation*) to grant the degree and assumed overall responsibility.

By the beginning of the academic year 2004/05, an additional 52 universities had changed their degree structure to LMD. This encompassed all 32 universities of the 2004 group, all but one HEI from the 2003 group who had preferred to wait in the last year (8 institutions), and even some early adopters of the 2005 and 2006 groups C and D (3 and 9 institutions, respectively).

Several of the issues discussed before autumn 2004 remained on the agenda in autumn 2004 and beyond, such as finding the right balance between institutional innovation of curricula and the national coherence of the course offerings, the new conceptualisation of the *diplôme national*, the transition between the *licence* and the Masters phase, the future place of IUTs and IUPs in universities, and the

procedures for national quality control of *master* programmes offered by *grandes écoles*.[256]

One of the issues that became more important as the implementation of the reform progressed was the question of student selection upon entry to the Masters phase. In this context, the current duality between *licence* and *licence professionelle* programmes became an issue: if not all students could or wanted to proceed to the Masters phase, then a clear labour market perspective was also needed for holders of the general *licence* (CPU, 2005c). Other issues were the joint delivery of graduate degrees by universities and *grandes écoles*, and the application of the new degree structure to special subject areas such as architecture, law, medicine, animal health, and the arts which had so far not taken part in the reform. The approach of the ministry was not to push these disciplines, but wait until they themselves developed an interest in joining the reform.

8.4   Policy change until autumn 2004

Having pursued the policy formulation process over time, I now recapitulate the changes effected in degree structures and the other six dimensions of the French HE system until autumn 2004.

8.4.1   Institutional types

The French ministry in charge of HE sought to use the reform of degree structures to adjust the relationship between institutional types in two major ways: first, to bridge the gap between universities and *grandes écoles* and second, to achieve better integration of the programmes of IUTs and IUPs into the overall course offering of universities.

Two reforms of the degree structure contributed to narrowing—to some extent—the gap between universities and *grandes écoles* at the graduate level: first, the introduction of the *grade de master* as an 'umbrella degree' encompassing existing qualifications of both institutional types at the Masters level and second, the new freedom for *grandes écoles* to grant state-controlled degrees at the Masters level with the *diplôme national de master*. Until autumn 2004, only a small number of *engineering schools* had made use of the latter to introduce engineering degrees for foreign students. At the undergraduate level, hardly any convergence was

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[256] In autumn 2004, referring to the Berlin declaration, Fillon also started an initiative to strengthen doctoral education and further develop the *écoles doctorales*, notably to improve the cooperation of external research centres and *grandes écoles* with universities (MEN, 2004b). A first step to strengthening international cooperation was new regulation easing the provision of joint doctoral degrees (MEN, 2004c).

achieved as the *grandes écoles* with few exceptions, did not adapt their traditional 2+3-structure and could not deliver the *licence*.

The convergence between universities and *grandes écoles* was also fostered by steps that brought Masters-level programmes of *grandes écoles* under closer state control and made the quality assurance of their programmes more similar to that of universities. In order to qualify for the *grade de master,* the business schools among the *grandes écoles* for instance, had to submit their Masters-level programmes to national *habilitation* for the first time—in their case by the Helfer Commission. State control was even stricter to qualify for the *diplôme national de master*, in principle subjecting *grandes écoles* programmes to the same quality criteria as university programmes. The Duby Commission was created to achieve this for engineering degrees for foreigners.

By autumn 2004, interest had grown among *grandes écoles* to offer research Masters programmes, and to a lesser extent professional Masters programmes, for French students. Consequently, a trend towards a common quality assurance regime at the graduate level and increased cooperation of universities and *grandes écoles* in the provision of graduate degrees could be anticipated. Smaller *grandes écoles*, in particular, had strong incentives to cooperate with universities to increase their institutional research capacity and meet the ministry's strict preconditions for the *habilitation* of research Masters programmes.

The ministry's policies on the integration of the programmes of IUTs and IUPs into universities changed over time. Both had traditionally been separate organisational units within universities. While the ministry always intended to keep the IUTs separate, it later decided to amalgamate them completely with the universities. By autumn 2004 there was no sign however, that the latter plan would be implemented.

As for better cooperation between IUTs and other parts of universities, the result was mixed. The creation of the *licence professionelle* provided new avenues for the cooperation of universities and IUTs, but institutions did not use them to the envisaged extent. Many *licence professionelle* programmes were instead offered completely within IUTs, with little transfer options for university students. As for the IUP programmes, their redesign was still ongoing by autumn 2005; but the aim to bring them fully in line with the LMD structure was clear.

At a deeper level, not much had changed in the relationship between universities and IUTs by 2004. Commenting on the high drop-out numbers in French HE reported by the OECD (2004), the CPU deplored the "human, economic and social waste" of the French HE system which led the majority of students from the technological and professional *bac* into the DEUG where they were bound to fail, while the BTS and DUT created for them were occupied by holders of the general *bac* (CPU, 2004b).

8.4.2 Degree structure

The reform of degree structures in France was largely confined to the university sector. At the start of the academic year in autumn 2004, 71 of 88 French universities (81%) had made the transition to LMD fully or some of them in part, with the exception of a few (mainly medical) subjects (CPU, 2004a).[257] The transition was not achieved by creating new degree levels but by phasing out existing ones. At the undergraduate level the DEUG, traditionally granted after two years, was now only awarded upon a student's special request; the same held for the *maîtrise* at the graduate level.[258] The title of the undergraduate degree (*licence*) remained unchanged, but the ministry encouraged—and partly enforced—curricular innovation (see section 8.2.4 on 'curricula'), also in the newly created *licence professionelle*. At graduate level, two new degree titles were created, the *grade de master* and the *diplôme national de master*. The remaining further university qualifications at the level of the *maîtrise* (e.g., MST, MIAGE, MSG) and the Masters (e.g., DESS, DEA, *Magistère*) were phased out and their curricula integrated into the new two-year Masters programmes (*diplôme national de master)*. The length of university programmes, both up to the *licence* and up to the *master*, remained unchanged (3+2).

The formal degree titles, *licence* and *diplôme national de master*, did not include an indication of the field studied (not even whether it was 'Arts' or 'Science'). But degree certificates specified both the larger thematic field (*domaine*) and the discipline (*mention*).

The traditional two-year qualifications offered by IUTs and STSs remained unchanged. In addition, both could now provide courses for the third year of the new *licence professionelle*, but they were not allowed to grant degrees at that level. The traditional qualifications of the IUPs were phased out and their course offer integrated into LMD. Specific IUP Masters programmes were set up that did lead to university degrees. Consequently, the level of IUP programmes increased from '*bac*+4' (the former *ingénieur-maître*) to '*bac*+5'.

Other specialist institutions under the authority of the ministry in charge of HE that involved cooperation with other ministries, such as in the Arts and Architecture, were a bit slower to respond by were preparing the transition as

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[257] This count covers the member institutions of the CPU, including the *Instituts Nationals Polytechniques* (INPs), engineering schools under the authority of the ministry in charge of HE. By the start of the academic year 2005/06 in autumn 2005, all but one (*Antilles Guyane*) of the remaining 19 universities had made the full transition to the LMD structure—15 from the 2005 group of (*vague* C), one from the 2003 group (*vague* A) and one from the 2006 group (*vague* D); thus nearly completing the list. Of the 88 universities and INPs, 87 had by then made the transition.

[258] Abandoning the *maîtrise* completely had not been possible as it continued to be the formal minimum qualification for high-level careers in the teaching profession based on a competitive exam, the *aggregation*.

well. *Grandes écoles* kept their traditional one-cycle degrees leading directly to the Masters level and did not introduce a degree at the Bachelor level.[259] At the Masters level, they were partly integrated into the LMD structure by means of the *grade de master* and the *diplôme national de master*.[260]

The traditional formal classification of degree types into state degrees (*diplôme national*) and institutional degrees and the informal distinction between 'general' and 'professionalised' degrees held true for the new degrees as well.[261] In addition, a new formal distinction between *grade* (indicating the four main levels; *bac*, *licence*, *master* and *doctorat*), *titre* (indicating the intermediary levels; such as DEUG and *maîtrise*) and *diplôme* (indicating the particular subject and curriculum by which the qualification area was obtained) was introduced.

To recapitulate, within the new degree structure, only universities granted degrees at the Bachelor level (the *licence* and *licence professionelle*), while at the Masters level, both universities and *grandes écoles* including engineering schools granted degrees (besides the *grade de master* and the *diplôme national de master*, their traditional qualifications continued to exist).

8.4.3 Curricular governance

The French ministry in charge of HE used the reform of degree structures to reform the inherited *habilitation* system for university degrees. They allowed for more curricular diversity and institutional initiative in curricular design, and moved from a formal check of compliance of individual curricula with national curricular frameworks to a broader evaluation of programme quality. The ministry also used the opportunity to extend its influence over the *grandes écoles*.

To achieve all this, the system of subject-area specific frameworks (*maquettes*) that had so far governed the curricula leading to the *licence* was abandoned (at the

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[259] Except for few institutions (like the INSA in Toulouse), and some of them certifying attainment of the Bachelor level to mobile students upon demand.

[260] While they continued to grant their traditional qualifications, on top of those, they were entitled to grant the new *grade de master* for their unchanged long-one cycle programmes (subject to certain accreditation criteria). In addition, they were entitled to grant the *diplôme national de master* for two-year Master programmes if they submitted them to state quality control. Up to 2004, this remained largely confined to engineering programmes for foreigners. Finally, *grandes écoles* continued to grant the *Mastère specialisé*, a highly specialised and applied, one-year postgraduate qualification at level '*bac* + 6' for mature students.

[261] While it was one of the aims of the LMD reform to bridge the gap between general and 'professionalised' degrees, the dichotomy was not overcome. At the undergraduate level, *licence* and *licence professionelle*, at the graduate level, a research and a professional master were distinguished (*master recherche, master professionnel*). Furthermore, the clearly professionally-oriented degrees of IUTs and STSs remained apart, although the permeability to university studies was somewhat improved by the *licence professionelle*. Finally, the divide between rather professionally-oriented degrees of *grandes écoles* and those of the universities continued.

Masters level, they did not exist even before 1998) and universities were encouraged to come up with their own curricula. Evaluation was no longer based on individual programmes but on the overall coherence and academic strengths of a university's programmes offered and the task distribution between HEIs within a region. Towards this end, institutions were asked to reorganise their academic programmes according to 'domains', '*mentions*', and, for the Masters level, 'specialisations' (*domaine – mention – spécialisation*). The overall responsibility for the authorisation of degree programmes remained with the DES, but increased attention was paid to whether graduate programmes were rooted in proven research capacity. Towards this end, the MUS which was previously responsible for the disciplinary evaluation of research quality in general was replaced with a new body, the MSTP, which got an extended educational task and now evaluated both research and professional Masters programmes. Additionally, commissions for other special programmes remained in place, and a new one was created for the *licence professionelle* programmes. While universities' proposals still had to ultimately be presented to the CNESER, these debates now took place at a more general level. The *habilitation* remained a centralised process carried out in four-year cycles as part of the contract policy. This implied that every year, about one fourth of HEIs under authority of the ministry in charge of HE had to submit all programmes offered for re-*habilitation* to the ministry, at one common deadline. Consequently, the implementation of LMD would take four years to complete, formally beginning in the academic year 2003/04 (group A, 2003-206) and proceeding through group B (2004-2007), group C (2005-2008) and group D (2006-2009). However, the first universities had made the transition in 2002 already and all but one had made the transition by the academic year 2005, some of them ahead of their regular turn.

The ministry initially did not impose a national framework for the definition of 'domains', 'disciplines' and 'specialisations', but by autumn 2004 it became clear that some national coordination was needed in the interest of readability and overall coherence. The same held for the denominations appearing on degree certificates, which the ministry had also initially left up to universities.

The planning of national programme capacities and the national coherence of HE remained within the hands of the ministry. It received increased attention under a new 'campus policy' (*politique des sites*), asking HEIs in a region to coordinate their programmes with a view to their research strengths and if needed, to pool resources for the joint delivery of degrees (*co-habilitation*).

The *licence professionelle* programmes were evaluated by a commission specifically set up for this purpose with strong employer participation, the CNE. Finally, the ministry in charge of HE also made use of the reform of degrees to extend its influence over the *grandes écoles* (see sections 8.4.1 on 'institutional types' and 8.4.2 on 'degree structure').[262]

8.4.4   Curricula

Similar to the reform of degree structures, the reform of curricula remained largely confined to the university sector. Here, the most tangible change at both Bachelor and Masters levels was the general introduction of both ECTS and modularisation, and the move from an annual examination rhythm to a semester system.

Beyond that, the reform of degree structures and the introduction of ECTS were used by the ministry and the CPU to lend new impetus to a large number of curricular reform ideas, most of which had been around for years or even decades. Many had particular relevance for the undergraduate phase, such as improving student guidance in the first year of studies, increasing the flexibility and diversity of learning paths, introducing multi-disciplinary curricula, re-organising studies into a major-minor structure, introducing coherent specialisation options or 'tracks' (*parcours)* and defining transition paths (*passerelles*) between them, improving student counselling to facilitate their choice and reorientation, easing the recognition of prior learning in non-university contexts, and strengthening professionalisation (e.g., through the recognition of internships in terms of credits). Finally, universities should pay more attention to the teaching of foreign languages and IT skills. While these aspects were mentioned in the decrees governing the new degree structure (notably decree n° 2002-482 and *arrêté licence*) and received particular attention in the *habilitation* process, they could not be imposed and had only been partly implemented by autumn 2004 (*Comité de suivi de la licence*, 2004a). Overall however, the reform of degree structures contributed to curricular reform.

The introduction of the *licence professionelle* was meant to bring particular curricular reforms such as the strong participation of professionals in course design and provision; and new teaching methods such as group work, distance-learning, and tutored internships. While these objectives were mentioned in the relevant regulation (*arrêté licence professionelle*) and checked in the *habilitation* process, they too had only been partly implemented by autumn 2004 (*Comité de suivi des licences professionelles*, 2004).

At the Masters level, the introduction of the *diplôme national de master* required the integration of existing courses at that level into coherent two-year curricula.

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[262]   See also CPU (2004c) for a French summary of the reformed *habilitation* system.

The distinction of a research and a professional specialisation was maintained (*master recherche/master professionnel* instead of DEA/DESS), but rendered more flexible in terms of the timing of specialisation and transition paths between the two. Universities also had to pay increased attention to the research base of these programmes and the actual involvement of students in research, particularly for the *master recherche*. In so far as engineering schools and other *grandes écoles* wished to offer the *diplôme national de master*, they, too, had to reform the curricula of their programmes to comply with these criteria.

8.4.5 Access

The most decisive feature of the access regime of French HE was not changed by the reform of degree structures, namely the differences in student selection between universities and *grandes écoles*. For universities, too, the formal regulation of access was not changed between 1998 to 2004, at both undergraduate and graduate levels. While university programmes were restructured into a first and second cycle, the first formal selection point formally remained where it had been, after the *maîtrise*; now in the middle of the new two-year Masters programmes. This caused however tensions at the level of universities, as it proved difficult to reconcile with the aim to create integrated two-year Masters curricula, to encourage student mobility between the first and the second cycle, and to attract foreign students. Particularly, the selection after the first 60 credits did not fit the curricular models suggested by the ministry for this phase ("V", "T" and "I") and that should overcome the inherited DESS and DEA (see section 8.3.5.1). Student and staff unions anticipated these tensions early on, which rendered access one of the most disputed aspects of the reform despite the absence of regulatory change. The tensions remained unresolved up until autumn 2004, with different solutions to be found in different universities.[263]

8.4.6 Transition to employment

The need for lifelong learning and permeable pathways between HE and the world of work were important themes in French HE reform between 1998 and 2004, though they were fostered less by the changed degree structure than the improved recognition of prior learning. The major advance in this regard came from the "social modernisation law" which was subsequently applied to HE by

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[263] In May 2005, the CPU plenary passed a position paper on the issue, suggesting among other things, the extension of teaching capacities at Master level up to the previous level of *maîtrise* graduates in combination with improved student counselling in the final years of the *licence* (CPU, 2005c).

means of two decrees (n° 2002-529 and -590). In principle it allowed the granting of a full HE degree based on the assessment of competencies acquired by professional experience of a minimum of three years, including voluntary work. The recognition of prior learning was also facilitated by the introduction of ECTS. The way the ministry in charge of HE framed the reform, ECTS was explicitly meant to take into account informal learning in terms of credits and support the permeability between HE and employment by improving the portability of student achievements over time and between HEIs (*capitalisation*).

The reform of degree structure did not create new entry levels to the labour market. Instead, it strengthened the existing *licence* and Masters level as exit points from university studies and weakened the DEUG and the *maîtrise.* In this regard, it will be interesting to observe whether the previously high non-completion rates—and thus the number of students leaving with the DEUG or less—will go down, and more students will achieve the *licence.* Similarly, it remained to be seen in 2004 whether the *licence* would indeed become an accepted degree opening attractive opportunities in the labour market, or whether most students would attempt to continue to the Masters degree—given that the *maîtrise* had previously been a frequent exit point.

With respect to establishing the *licence* as an entry point to the labour market, empirical evidence up until autumn 2004 pointed to the limiting effect of the duality between the general *licence* and the *licence professionelle.* The general *licence* still did not sufficiently prepare graduates for the labour market, in spite of the curricular reform's efforts to 'professionalise' them. Ultimately, the main thrust of the general *licence* was still to prepare for graduate studies. And while the *licence professionelle* opened clear labour-market perspectives, far too few places existed to make it a real alternative for the majority of students (a total of 1003 mostly small-scale programmes by autumn 2004 (*Comité de suivi de la licence professionelle,* 2004)). Given the concept of the programme, the capacities were bound to remain limited.[264]

8.4.7 Funding

Funding of programmes and institutions changed little in the context of the adaptation of degree structures to LMD. The fee regime did not change except for incremental adjustments of the administration charge, and the ministry had no ambitions in this regard—the student protests of Winter 2003/2004 that were partially directed against the introduction of tuition fees in the context of LMD

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[264] The CPU plenary noted these problems in May 2004 (CPU, 2005c) and suggested several measures, among them the stronger professional orientation of the general *licence*, bridging the gap between the *licence* and the *licence professionelle*, improved student counselling to help develop a labour-market perspective, and reorientation programmes for unemployed *licence* graduates.

were unfounded. The system of institutional funding was also barely adjusted to account for the new degree structure. Universities continued to receive operating funds according to the number and type of students (differentiated by subject area and the different levels of study), from which salaries of full-time staff were deduced. While academic staff unions as well as the CPU had repeatedly asked for additional funds to finance the improvements of student tutoring and the curricular reforms that were part of LMD, the ministry remained firm, holding that the efficiency gains from reduced drop-out rates, the avoidance of programmes with insufficient student numbers, and a better coherence of the overall course offering would fund the additional costs (Interview Nicolas, 2004).[265] Independent of the reform of degree structures, a major revision of the funding system of the entire public sector had been underway since 2001 that would also affect the funding of HE as of 2006 (*loi organique relative aux lois de finances*, LOLF*)*.

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[265] The only indirect effect on funding might result from increased student numbers in the Master phase following the move to an integrated two-year programme at that level; a development anticipated by the CPU (2005c).

9 England

The United Kingdom (UK) comprises four countries—England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. The vast majority of the British higher education institutions (HEIs) are in England.[266]. Since 1999, Scotland and Wales have devolved authority over their higher education (HE) sectors, which differ in several respects.[267] While degree structures and curricula in Wales—and to a lesser extent in Northern Ireland—are similar to those in England, Scottish HE is based on an inherently different tradition. I therefore decided to limit this case study to England.

9.1 Actors and their capabilities

At governmental level, English HE in 1998 was the responsibility of a Secretary of State as chief minister heading the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). In 2001, the employment functions were transferred to a newly created Department for Work and Pensions, and the DfEE became the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Both are henceforth referred to as 'the Department' or 'Department responsible for HE'.[268] The Secretary of State was commonly supported by two to three pairs of junior ministers—the Ministers of State—and Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State; one of whom was responsible for higher

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[266] There were 174 HEIs in Britain in 1997/98, of which 137 (79%) were in England. 83% of all students in Britain were enrolled in HEIs in England (HESA, 1999). These numbers only include publicly funded HEIs; the University of Buckingham is however the only exclusively privately funded HEI in England. The numbers also exclude foreign HEIs active in the UK.

[267] Legislation on devolution to Scotland was introduced in the Westminster Parliament in December 1997, and passed into law the following November (Scotland Act 1998). The first election to the Scottish Parliament for almost 300 years was held in May 1999 and it met for the first time in July. At the same time, a Scottish Executive Education Department was set up. Similarly, the people of Wales narrowly endorsed government proposals to devolve certain powers and responsibilities to a National Assembly in 1997. The Government of Wales Act of 1998 laid down the necessary statutory framework to establish the National Assembly for Wales, which held its first elections in May 1999 and began functioning as a devolved administration two months later. 'Learning Wales' is the Welsh Assembly Government's Training and Education Department (Directgov, 2006).

[268] Throughout the entire period from 1998 to 2004, HE policy was determined by the Labour Party. From 05/1997 to 06/2001, David Blunkett was Secretary of State for Education and Employment. He was followed first by Estelle Morris (06/2001-10/2002) and then Charles Clarke (10/2002-12/2004) as Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Since December 2004, Ruth Kelly holds this position.

and further education (FE). Within the bureaucracy, the Director General of the HE and FE Directorate was the highest responsible official for HE.[269]

While there were several Acts of Parliament covering HE issues, there was no single encompassing act governing English HE. New policies were usually formulated in government white papers which were then discussed in the HE sector and in Parliament and ultimately formalised in programmes or sometimes also in acts. Expert commissions set up by the government played an important role in initiating major changes of policy. One such commission, the 'National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education' had just published its report in 1997. It was chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, a highly regarded education expert who had formerly been Chairman of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and was currently Chancellor of the University of Nottingham and Chairman of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. In the latter position, he had also chaired a recent ad hoc review of the secondary school curriculum (Dearing, 1996). The Commission's recommendations, henceforth referred to as the 'Dearing Report', were influential in most policy debates in the institutional dimensions I present in the next section.[270]

Given a strong tradition of university autonomy, the Department had relatively little influence over HEIs, especially with respect to degrees and curricula. Universities were traditionally degree-granting institutions not in need of public authorisation or accreditation and themselves able to validate the degrees of other institutions (see sections 9.2.1 on 'institutional types' and 9.2.3 on 'curricular governance'). Mainly through two intermediary organisations for funding and quality assurance, the Department nevertheless did exert some steering power; the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Since the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, HEFCE, a non-departmental public body, was in charge of distributing public money for teaching and research to HEIs in England.[271] Through policies and projects to ensure accountability, promote quality, and spread good practice;

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[269] In England, the college sector comprises colleges of HE and FE, so that FE and HE policies are closely intertwined. Under Blunkett, Baroness Tessa Blackstone was the Minister of State responsible for HE and Skills and the Labour Government's education spokesman in the House of Lords. Under Morris and Clarke, the responsibility for HE, FE, and Lifelong learning was first with Margaret Hodge (06/2002-06/2003) and then with Alan Johnson (06/2003-09/2004). Only in 2004 was a separate Directorate for HE created.

[270] The previous review of similar reach had been undertaken by the Robbins Committee in 1963 (Robbins Report, 1963).

[271] For Wales, this was the task of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) (referred to as Education and Learning Wales (ELWa); the joint name for the HEFCW and the National Council for Education and Training for Wales). For Scotland, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) were responsible. In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning distributed the funding itself.

the funding regime gave HEFCE significant influence. Since 1997, the QAA "provided an integrated quality assurance service" for the entire UK (QAA, 2003a: 3). Many of its policies did however differ between England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, accounting for the devolved context.[272] Funded by subscriptions of universities and HE colleges as well as by the HEFCE and the three other national funding councils, its governing board comprised representatives from the Department as well as from the sector so that it effectively functioned as a buffer institution between HEIs, the HEFCE, and the state. Through its audits and reviews and the development of standards, frameworks, and guidelines; the QAA played an important role in HE policy (see 'curricular governance').

The most important representative organisations of the HE sector were the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP)—renamed Universities UK in 2000—the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP), and the National Union of Students (NUS). The existence of two representative organisations of HEIs broadly reflected the division of British HE into two main institutional types: universities and colleges (see section 9.2.1. on 'institutional types'). Specifically, CVCP represented around 122 HEIs in the entire UK, and was made up mostly of universities and university colleges.[273] Since the devolution of Scotland and Wales, it was organised into sub-groups for Wales, Scotland, and England and Northern Ireland.[274] It also worked through a number of 'sector groups' (since 2001 referred to as 'strategy groups'), among them one for international strategy. In December 2000, CVCP gave itself a new statute and name—Universities UK—to reflect the full integration of the 'new universities' (see section 9.2.1. on 'institutional types'). SCOP represented 47 of the about 55 HE colleges and non-university HEIs in the UK, of which 45 were in England and two were in Northern Ireland. NUS was "a voluntary membership organisation comprising a confederation of [around 750] local student representative organisations throughout the UK and Northern Ireland" (NUS, 2004a) and a total membership of around five million students. It ran a wide range of student support services through student unions. All three organisations were regularly consulted by the Department on an informal basis.

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[272] For example, different review methods were applied in Wales and in Scotland (QAA, 2003a). Also, two separate frameworks for HE qualifications were later developed for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and for Scotland (see also Brennan & Williams, 2004: 477; QAA, 2001a, 2001b).

[273] University colleges were degree-granting colleges. For historical reasons Universities UK also included some colleges of HE; among them the HE colleges of Scotland and Wales, and some colleges of the University of London.

[274] The precise names of these sub-groups changed several times between 1998 and 2004. Since 2000, they are referred to as Universities Scotland, Higher Education Wales, and the England and Northern Ireland Council.

National employer organisations played only a minor role in English HE policy; their main involvement with HEIs was through cooperation in professionally-oriented degree programmes and their accreditation (see section 9.2.6). Of the other actors that played a role in English HE policy, only a few shall be named here. Both the British Council and the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council furthered internationalisation and European co-operation, respectively; and the UK National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC) was contracted by the Department to advise on the international comparability of HE qualifications. University and college academics were represented through the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFE), respectively. Both unions concentrated on personnel and labour issues and played only a minor role in general HE policy.

9.2   Institutional setting in early 1998

9.2.1   Institutional types

Two main types of HEIs dominated the English HE system in 1998: universities and colleges of HE. The concept of 'degree awarding powers' was constitutive for the distinction between these two institutional types; while some colleges of HE had the right to grant taught degrees, the right to grant research degrees (i.e., Masters degrees based on a major thesis and doctoral degrees) was a precondition for university status. Additionally, universities had to provide a certain range of subjects and enrol a minimum number of students.

The English university sector, the so-called 'unitary system', comprised 87 institutions (HEFCE, 1999: 3).[275] It included the former polytechnics which had been given the right to grant research degrees up to the doctorate level by the Higher Education Acts of 1988 and 1992, elevating them to university status. Nevertheless, the inherited status differences between the 'old and the 'new' universities persisted, and some aspects such as academic staff structures and contracts, were still different.

Similarly, there were several more or less formal groups among the 'old universities'. Up to the present, the medieval universities of Oxford and Cambridge continued to constitute the reference point for teaching and research

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[275] Parts of the presentation in section 9.2, particularly those on 'institutional diversity', 'degree structure' 'access', 'curricula', and 'transition to employment', draw heavily on an earlier publication in German, focusing on Anglo-Saxon models of undergraduate education which already made use of the framework developed for this thesis (Witte et al., 2004).

universities, even if institutions such as Imperial College, the London School of Economics, and Warwick University had long since been attested a comparable—and occasionally better—level by research rankings. A second group was formed by the 'red brick universities', founded in the late 19th and early 20th century, named after the architectural style of the Victorian age. Serving the new academic needs of the industrial age, they were predominantly technically-oriented.[276] Together with other research-strong universities, many institutions of these two groups came together to form the 'Russell Group'. The universities founded after World War II were sometimes referred to as 'glass plate universities', also referring to their architectural style. Among them, a group of campus universities was founded in the 1960s with the mission to liberalise the 'Oxbridge' curriculum, thereby making it accessible to wider circles of students. Many of these were members of the '1994 Group', which united institutions with high but explicitly non-elitist ambitions.[277] Many of the 'new universities' had joined the 'Campaign for Mainstream Universities' (CMU). The Open University founded in 1969 was a successful distance-learning institution. Only one private university[278] existed, the University of Buckingham (see also Theisens, 2003).

The traditional differences between groups of HEIs were also visible in their academic profiles. While the focus of the research universities was on graduate programmes and academically-oriented undergraduate programmes, the 'new universities' focused on undergraduate studies, offering professionally-oriented programmes in the technical and social fields, as well as in health (except for medicine) (Jenniskens, 1997; Ramsden, 2003). Similar to some of the 'red brick universities', the former polytechnics had profited from the expansion of English HE, as they were more accessible for students with diverse backgrounds. They offered many short HE programmes below the Bachelor level and some had a large percentage of part-time students (Brennan & Shah, 1993). Overall, the research profile of these institutions remained weak (Brennan & Woodley, 2000). These different institutional profiles in a formally 'unitary system' were perpetuated by policies on access to HE and the design of HE funding (see sections 9.2.5. and 9.2.7.), as most of them performed poorly in the research assessment exercises (RAE) conducted by HEFCE to determine the level of research funding.

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[276] Unlike Oxford and Cambridge, they were not founded on religious backgrounds and not based on the college system. The term 'red brick university' did however become increasingly blurred and was sometimes used to denote any technically-oriented university that was not a former polytechnic. Six 'big civic universities', founded in the industrial towns of Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Bristol, and Birmingham formed the core of this group.

[277] Among these campus universities of the 1960s were Kent, Sussex, York, Warwick, East Anglia, and Essex. Except for Kent, they and others formed the '1994 Group' as a coalition of smaller research-intensive universities as a complement to the Russell Group of large universities. LSE and the University of Warwick are part of both groups.

[278] It was private in the sense that it did not rely predominantly on public funds.

The second major part of the English HE system was made up of the about 47 colleges of HE (henceforth also referred to as 'HE colleges')(HEFCE, 1999: 3). This sector comprised a wide spectrum of institutions, many of them small and specialised, including colleges of arts and music, teacher training colleges, and colleges with a religious background. Notably, the boundary to the adjacent colleges of further education (FE) was fluid. They were highly diverse, offering both general and professional courses in secondary and post-secondary education to young and mature learners. Many colleges had one foot in FE and one in HE; they qualified as HEIs[279] if at least 55% of their courses was in HE i.e., counting towards an undergraduate degree. Most HE colleges were not degree-granting and provided undergraduate programmes in co-operation with universities who validated them. Some HE colleges could award taught and some even research degrees, and offered programmes up to the graduate level.[280] Through the college sector, permeable pathways into HE existed for students without the traditional secondary education qualifications, mature learners, and professionals (see section 9.2.5 on 'access'). They could begin in a college and continue their studies in a cooperating university.

The Dearing Report (1997: Chapter 10) had recommended that the QAA should review the arrangements in place for granting degree-awarding powers, which would possibly change the delineations between universities and colleges.

9.2.2   Degree structure

Owing to the traditional autonomy of English HEIs, no regulatory framework prescribing a national degree structure existed. HEIs could in principle offer degrees of any length and award any titles they wanted. Nevertheless, some common patterns had evolved.

The normative degree at English universities was the 'Bachelor with Honours', also referred to as the 'Honours degree', commonly granted after three years of full-time studies. Some students also did a Masters degree, either directly upon completion of their 'Honours' or after some years of work experience. Most Masters degrees took a year of full-time studies, but there were also two-year programmes; these often contained a research project and were conceived as a stepping stone towards the doctorate.

Contrary to what is frequently assumed, the 'Bachelor with Honours' did not indicate a particular level of specialisation or outstanding student achievement.[281]

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[279]   …and were eligible for membership of SCOP.

[280]   Nevertheless, the latter did not possess university status because they were too specialised.

[281]   Within the degree, different overall grades were distinguished: First, Upper Second, Lower Second, Third, and Pass. The so-called 'ordinary Bachelors degree' was traditionally granted to

For Honours degrees, the most common degree title specifications were 'Bachelor of Science' (BSc)[282] and 'Bachelor of Arts' (BA), parallel to the division of academia into sciences and arts. Particularly for professionally-oriented programmes, a wide range of additional specifications was in use, such as 'Bachelor of Laws' (LLB), 'Bachelor of Engineering' (BEng), and 'Bachelor of Education' (BEd). There was no distinction of 'academic' versus 'professional' Bachelor degrees or the like. While most Honours programmes took three years, four-year programmes also existed. They were common in Arts and Music where a 'foundation year' was mandatory. Furthermore, programmes combining different subjects sometimes required four years, especially if they integrated a year abroad, required the acquisition of a foreign language, or demanded the mastery of a second discipline.

Similar to the Honours degrees, the most common degree titles at Masters level were 'Master of Science' (MSc) and 'Master of Arts' (MA), but special (professional) specialisations were often also expressed in titles such as 'Master of Social Policy', 'Master of Public Health' or 'Master of Finance'. For two-year programmes conceived as preparation for a Doctorate, the 'Master of Philosophy' (MPhil) was a common degree. The Doctorate was commonly granted after another two years on top of the MPhil, and led to the title PhD or DPhil.[283]

Below the Honours level, a number of professionally-oriented 'sub-degree level' qualifications existed, such as the one-year Higher National Certificate (HNC) and the two-year Higher National Diploma (HND). These were predominantly offered by colleges of HE in co-operation with a validating university partner, and were accredited by a special privately owned commercial agency, EdExcel. The curricula of these programmes were practically-oriented, involved internships, and were often offered in close cooperation with employers. They were conceived as separate programmes for less academically-inclined students, but could also serve as stepping stones for an Honours degree. The HNC was often taken part-time by employees with the support of employers. In addition to the HNC and HND, English universities offered the possibility to certify learning that had taken place on the way towards an incomplete Honours degree by granting the one-year 'Certificate of Higher Education' and the two-year 'Diploma of Higher Education'.[284]

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students who did not fulfil the minimum requirements of a 'Pass degree' in an Honours programme.

[282] Different from the Netherlands and Germany, in England the dots are commonly omitted from the abbreviations these days, and I follow this usage.

[283] …the former following the tradition of Cambridge, the latter of Oxford, with no difference in concept or value.

[284] While the Diploma of HE is a HE award in its own right, it tended to be awarded in the context of modular degree programmes as an intermediate qualification or a stop-off point (particularly for part-time students) rather than as a stand alone programme. But it was an academic award and

At graduate level, too, a number of programmes existed besides the Masters degree which led to an academic level between Bachelor and Masters, and mostly prepared for concrete professional tasks. Among them were the one-year 'Postgraduate Certificate' (PGC) and the 'Postgraduate Diploma'. The 'Postgraduate Certificate of Education' (PGCE) for example, prepared for the teaching profession based on an Honours degree in a relevant discipline. But also in areas such as management or health care, certificates and diplomas were widespread. Their content was often a part of a corresponding Masters programme and offered in modules. This allowed professionals to successively work towards a degree, while each step had its own value.

A particularity of the English HE system was the Oxbridge tradition to grant the Masters degree after the graduate had gained some professional experience, as a sign of maturity or special honour. Oxford and Cambridge did however, also offer regular Masters degrees. Another special case was engineering education, where four-year undergraduate programmes leading directly to the 'Master of Engineering' (MEng) had been introduced as an alternative to a one-year practical training on top of a BEng (see section 9.2.6 on 'transition to employment'). Similar programmes existed in science, such as the MSci, MPhys, and MChem.[285]

To improve the national consistency the English degree structure and of degree titles awarded by English HEIs, the Dearing Report (1997: Chapter 10) had recommended that the QAA would adopt a "national framework for higher education qualifications", and made a proposal for such a framework.

9.2.3 Curricular governance

In practical terms, English HEIs did not depend upon state authorisation for their degree programmes. The 'old universities' had their taught and research degree awarding powers (see 'institutional types') enshrined in a Royal Charter; the 'new universities' and the colleges of HE with taught-degree awarding powers operated under an Act of Parliament (Brennan & Williams, 2004: 475).

English HEIs looked back on a strong tradition of assuming responsibility for their degrees based on the principle of peer review (Brennan & Williams, 2004; Interview Williams, 2004; QAA, 2003a). Since 1990, the Academic Audit Unit set up by the CVCP had undertaken systematic 'institutional audits' of universities' internal management of academic quality and standards. These were based on a

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could only be made where the student had achieved the requirements for it rather than as a compensation for failure in a degree (Interview Campbell, 2004).

[285] In the Scottish HE system, long one-cycle undergraduate degrees that led directly to a Master degree after four years of study were the norm. In England these were regarded as equivalent to an English honours degree based on differences in the secondary school traditions of England and Scotland (see section 9.2.5 on 'access').

combination of internal and external evaluation and largely organised by universities themselves. Since 1992 the 'new universities' had joined these processes, and the tradition was continued by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC).[286] In parallel, the Quality Assessment Division (QAD) of the funding councils had undertaken 'subject reviews' since 1993, also referred to as 'teaching quality assessments'(QAA, 2003b). They took place at the level of the subject or department and focused directly on the quality of curriculum design and teaching and learning (Findlay, 2004).

In 1997, the HEQC and HEFCE's QAD merged to form the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), following a recommendation of the Dearing Report. This merger reflected a compromise between stronger public demands for the accountability of HEIs and the tradition of curricular autonomy. The QAA initially continued to undertake both the inherited audits and subject reviews (Findlay, 2004; Interview Williams, 2004) according to its mission "to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of HE qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE" (QAA, 2003a: 3).

In some clearly circumscribed professional fields such as medicine, pharmacy, and nursing, programmes were accredited by statutory bodies to safeguard the public interest. In fields such as engineering or law this task was assumed by professional bodies. Beyond these areas, the concept of 'accreditation' was not important in the English HE system (Brennan & Williams, 2004; Harvey & Mason, 1995).

There was no public agency looking after the coherence of the overall provision in English HE. While the procedures for funding partly ensured this by channelling public funds into priority areas (see section 9.2.6. on 'funding'), the main responsibility for meeting the demands of students and labour markets was born by HEIs themselves.

9.2.4 Curricula

In 1998, the classical English Honours programme still provided the role model for undergraduate education. It entailed studying a single academic subject with an increasing degree of specialisation (Robbins Report, 1963). The idea of general studies was not common—despite the fact that the traditional Oxbridge model allowed for more student choice than usual in other universities. Following a tradition beginning in secondary schools already (see section 9.2.5. on 'access'),

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[286] In the 'new universities', external quality assurance had traditionally been stronger. Since 1965 their degrees had been accredited by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) (see also D. A. Turner, Baba, & Shimada, 1999); this requirement was lifted with their admission to university status. Parts of the old CNAA merged with the Academic Quality Unit to form the HEQC.

the in-depth mastery of disciplinary content and methods tended to be given more weight than broad general knowledge (Schnitzer, 1998). The aim of an Honours degree was to lead students to the frontiers of knowledge in a particular academic discipline.

In spite of this tradition, increasing student numbers since the 1980s contributed to the spread of professionally-oriented and multi-disciplinary programmes such as media and business studies. The student- and professionally-oriented programmes of the 'new universities' also influenced the curricular models of the more traditional universities and supported the emergence of 'Joint Honours' and 'Combined Honours' degrees. At the same time, some leading universities believed these new models to be inconsistent with their status as research institutions (Fulton, 1996). The recommendations of the Dearing Report (1997: Chapter 9) reflected the trend towards more breadth in undergraduate education as well as efforts to reconcile it with the traditional idea that the 'Honours degree' should certify a high level of specialisation.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, these tendencies mingled with a trend towards modularisation, the introduction of credits, more flexible programme structures, and government efforts at stronger standardisation. In this regard, too, the Dearing Report followed a wide trend by recommending the adoption of a common credit transfer system. No such system existed in England so far. Instead, different regional groups of universities worked together on shared definitions of modules and credits to facilitate the mutual recognition of student achievements (EWNI, 2001). It was common to assign 120 credits per year of studies, but the size of modules and the definitions of credit levels differed.[287] Traditionally, the academic year was structured in three terms (autumn, spring, and summer). When modularising their programmes however, many institutions had moved to a semester system because they associated modularisation with examinations at the end of each academic unit. A bi-annual rhythm—following the US-model—seemed more sensible for that (Bekhradnia, 2004; Interview Harvey, 2004).

Classical defining characteristics of Masters curricula were their length: one or two years; their orientation: predominantly towards a profession or research; and their organisation: by coursework or research. However, many combinations and mixtures existed between these features. Research-oriented Masters programmes did not always take two years, nor did they always include a large thesis. Conversely, professionally-oriented Masters programmes could take two years and contain a significant thesis project. Moreover, the distinction between

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[287] Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland were more advanced in this regard. A Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) framework was in place. In Wales, a credit framework had been developed; and in Northern Ireland, a project to develop a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system covering further and higher education was advanced (Dearing Report, 1997: Chapter 10).

research and professional orientation was not very prevalent in the English system, and there were no legal provisions. This being so, the majority of Masters programmes lasted one-year, 'taught'—as opposed to a large, independent research project—and served to build expertise in a specialised field. The distinction between research and application orientation was secondary, and such specialised areas could encompass one or several disciplines. They were driven by developments both in academia and professional practice. Many were conceived for mid-career professionals to open new professional options. The two-year programmes frequently led to the MPhil and then to the Doctorate, certifying that all necessary coursework and the design of the research project had been completed. Often, students had the option to add an additional research year to an MA or MSc based on coursework, and then get the MPhil by beginning to prepare the doctorate. Finally, Professional Doctorate degrees existed such as the EdD; they were often part-time and based to a larger extent on coursework.

Success rates in undergraduate and graduate programmes were high, and there was virtually no gap between *de jure* and *de facto* length of studies.

9.2.5 Access

In 1998, English HEIs formed an integrated and strongly diversified system. Following an active expansion policy of the government, full-time student numbers had increased by 71% between the academic years 1989/90 and 1996/97 (DfEE, 1998b: Appendix 1). 33% of an age group achieved a first degree, 44% if sub-degree level qualifications were included (OECD, 2000). This trend provided one of the major challenges to which the Dearing Report (1997: Chapter 7) responded. In addition to a continued commitment to *increasing* participation, the report made specific recommendations for *widening* participation i.e., to increase the levels of participation of specific disadvantaged groups of society. Towards this end, "the cap on full-time undergraduate places should be lifted over the next two or three years and the cap on full-time sub-degree places should be lifted immediately" (ibid: Chapter 6). The Committee assumed that there was sufficient employer demand for graduates with these qualifications.

Simultaneously, access to HE was organised in a competitive system and HEIs were free to determine their own admissions policies without being constrained by a legal framework defining student rights to entry or formal minimum qualifications. Accordingly, the exact admissions criteria varied between universities and often even between programmes in one department. The most common requirements were two to three 'General Certificate of Education' (GCE) courses at 'advanced level' (the so-called A level; upper secondary education, awarded at the age of 18) in subject areas suiting the intended degree programme, plus a variable number of 'General Certificate of Secondary Education' (GSCE) courses (lower secondary education, awarded at the age of

16+). These requirements mirrored the traditionally strong degree of specialisation in English secondary education. The English school system was mainly a comprehensive system. Most students studied together up to the GSCE level; those preparing for HE then chose a limited number of A-level courses in areas of their talent and interest, ideally already with a view to the entry requirements of honours programmes they were potentially interested in. At the age of 16 already, students thus made important decisions for their future (Bekhradnia, 2003; Theisens, 2003). The exact subject requirements, their rigidity, as well as the required grades varied between subject areas and universities. Motivational essays and references from teachers also played a role; in exceptional cases also personal interviews.[288]

In addition to course requirements, differences in quality between government and private schools (the latter counter-intuitively referred to as 'public') also contributed to rendering secondary education an important determinant of access. Still, in 1998 about half of the British students at Oxford and Cambridge were private school graduates, while the percentage of all British pupils was only 10% (Eurydice, 2001). Social inequality in access to HE was a major issue in the English media.

It was however, not impossible to enter a university without A-level or even GSCE qualifications. Colleges of further and higher education, but also the 'new universities', offered a range of possibilities for non-traditional students to enter HE, recognising their formal and informal learning achievements in vocational training and work experience in terms of credits and giving them the opportunity to prove their abilities in sub-degree qualifications that could then serve as stepping stones towards a degree (Interview Rushforth, 2004). In fact, there was a fairly good tradition of some students being admitted to university without A levels—even Oxford admitted some each year (Interview Bekhradhnia, 2004).

In the years prior to 1998, increasing the breadth and flexibility of secondary education was increasingly discussed. In this context, the government endorsed the recommendation on the secondary curriculum Sir Ron Dearing had made before the 1997 Dearing Report to introduce so-called 'Advanced Subsidiary' (AS) courses, which would allow students to follow a larger number of subjects in less depth through half A-level courses (Dearing, 1996).

The selection process for undergraduate studies was managed by a central service agency called Universities and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS), which accepted applications for up to six different programmes and passed them on to HEIs. UCAS published the annual admissions requirements for specific

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[288] In Oxford, Cambridge, and the University College London, this was more common than elsewhere. Furthermore, they were either "statutory of standard practice for a range of subjects (teacher education, social work, medicine and health courses, performing arts and art and design)" (UUK, 2004c).

courses based on information provided by institutions and handled the process of matching supply and demand.[289]

Entry decisions for graduate programmes were handled directly by HEIs and were made on a much more individual basis than for undergraduates. Most universities required a good Bachelor with Honours.[290] The ultimate decision was however taken by university departments based on an overall assessment of the applicant's motivation and competencies; equivalent experience could substitute for an Honours degree. Consequently, the drop-out rate was very low among those so carefully selected.

9.2.6 Transition to employment

The Honours degree was the normative degree in England. It was well established on the labour market, largely independent of the applicability of the subjects studied. Generally speaking, English employers valued individual and interpersonal competencies higher than specific academic subject knowledge or even specific job-related knowledge (Brennan, Williams, & Blaskó, 2003; Harvey, 2003; Harvey & Green, 1994). In addition to traditional ideas of 'a gentleman's education', this was also based on the ever-changing requirements of the knowledge society in which intellectual training and character were perceived to be more important than specific knowledge with a short half-life.

In spite of this general consensus, since the mid-90s a debate had ensued about the 'employability' of graduates, i.e., the question of which competencies and skills graduates needed for the labour market (Interview Harvey, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2003). Not only 'new universities' increasingly paid attention to skills development courses, the development of students' personal planning and reflection competences, and the integration of internships in so-called 'sandwich programmes'. A visible sign for the importance assigned to this issue was the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) project of the Employment Department (1988-1996), which aimed to make HE programmes more vocationally oriented and encourage students' personal development via the improvement of transferable skills.[291] In a similar vein, the Dearing Report (1997: Chapter 9) had recommended to "help students to become familiar with work, and help them reflect on such experience". Among others, it had proposed the creation of a

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[289] For practical reasons, students had to hand in their applications prior to their final examinations; decisions were made based on expected final grades. Deviations from the projected results had to be balanced in a second round just before the start of the academic year; in this context, additional criteria such as references and essays could become important.

[290] ...upper second level or above according to the degree classification explained in footnote 281.

[291] It was a £60 million project involving some 20 thousand employers, over a million students and an academic staff of thousands.

"Progress File" as a means for "recording student achievement" and "by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development".

In a range of clearly delineated fields of practice, professional bodies—such as the 'Institution of Mechanical Engineers' or the 'Chartered Association of Certified Accountants'—influenced university curricula through the accreditation of programmes and the definition of required competencies; the level of involvement varied enormously between them. In some cases the licence to practice as a recognised professional[292] also required further practical training on top of an Honours degree, which was often organised under the auspices of these professional bodies.[293] To enter the legal profession, the law degree (or another degree plus a one-year conversion course) was followed by a vocational stage under the supervision of the 'Law Society' for solicitors or the 'General Council of the Bar' for barristers. In specific fields such as medicine, the public authority was exerted via statutory bodies such as the 'General Medical Council'. England had no tradition of separate 'state' degrees in particular fields; the public service traditionally recruited from a wide range of disciplines (Brennan & Williams, 2004; Harvey & Mason, 1995; Interview Scott, 2004).

The Honours degree was not the only HE qualification with which students could enter the labour market. Below this level, the HNC, HND, and to some extent the Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education also provided opportunities. Above this level, it became more common to do a Masters degree to acquire additional competencies in a specific professional field (see section 9.2.2. on 'degree structure'). It was common to do this after some years of work experience, part-time or experience-related, rendering the paths between HE and employment quite permeable.

9.2.7 Funding

After the severe funding cuts in HE imposed by the Thatcher government in the 1980s (Schreiterer & Witte, 2001: 6; Taylor, 2003) and further decreases in funding per student since then (Frans Kaiser et al., 2001),[294] the Labour Party had won the 1997 elections with the promise to put an end to this policy. This was also the thrust of the Dearing Report. To finance the turnaround, both the government and students would pay a share; to this end Dearing proposed to replace the

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[292] Strictly speaking, graduates were of course allowed to go and work with an Honours degree, but in practical terms it was often needed to attain membership in one of the recognised professional associations.

[293] To become a chartered engineer, students had to undertake a one-year accredited full-time training on top of an accredited BEng, or an accredited four-year undergraduate programme leading directly to the MEng.

[294] According to the Government White Paper 2003, "funding per student fell 36 per cent between 1989 and 1997" (DfES, 2003b:4).

current system of undergraduate fees funded entirely by grants from the government with a mixed system in which all students would carry a part of the cost of their tuition through fees, but would be supported by low-interest government loans. By early 1998, the funding situation of HEIs had indeed begun to stabilise, following a first additional injection of public funds in September 1997 (prnewswire, 1997).[295]

In spite of their tradition of institutional autonomy, English HEIs depended on the government for more than half of their funds (55%). Most of it came from the Department for Education and Employment. It was distributed through HEFCE (38%) and Local Education Authorities (LEAs), which paid the fees on behalf of UK and other EU students (12%). The Office of Science and Technology also contributed a share through the research councils, which provided research funding and support for postgraduate students (5%) (HEFCE, 1998: 4).

The biggest single funding block was thus provided to institutions through HEFCE. Determined annually by the government and voted in the Parliament based on input from the sector and a more fundamental spending review every few years, HEFCE decided the distribution of that budget between HEIs. It included a research and a teaching component, plus some funding earmarked for special projects (the ratio was about 70:20:10 in 1997/98). The funding was provided to institutions as a block grant which took into account "the size and activities of individual institutions and the quality of their research" (HEFCE, 1997).

The teaching allocation for universities was largely formula-based and included a significant 'per student'-component, differentiated by subject categories, modes (full- vs. part-time) and levels of study (undergraduate and taught postgraduate vs. research postgraduate) (Beverwijk, 1999). At the same time however, the funding model limited the number of students an HEI could recruit. This measure had been imposed by the Conservative government in response to the previous growth of student numbers, which had not been matched by an equal growth of funds (HEFCE, 1997). Following a review from 1995 to 1997, some revisions of the model had been decided and were effective from the start of the academic year 1998/99. The basic idea was to "fund similar activities at similar rates for all HEIs" and ensure "that any variations are for explicit and justifiable reasons" (HEFCE, 1998: 8), instead of giving "differing levels of funding to different institutions for historical rather than educational reasons" (ibid: 6). The revised method also included measures to support the new government's widening participation policy by taking into account "the extra cost of providing for certain types of student, such as part-timers and mature

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[295] In international comparison, the funding situation of English universities looked less severe. With an absolute expenditure per student of US$9699, the UK assumed a middle position among the OECD countries in 1998 (OECD, 2001: 67). With 45% of GDP per capita, relative expenditure per student even slightly surpassed the OECD country mean of 44%.

undergraduates" (ibid: 8). Subject-related differences were accounted for in four broad price groups. The cap on student numbers of each individual HEI was lifted, but there continued to be disincentives for institutions to recruit more than 5% above the agreed number.

There had been unregulated student fees for graduate students for a long time, but a considerable share had so far been paid by research councils or employers. By early 1998, the Labour government had decided to make ordinary undergraduate students pay their own fees for the first time. This measure was part of the government's package to secure and increase funding for HE. As of academic year 1998/99, undergraduate students would pay a standardised upfront fee of £1000, representing about a quarter of the average cost of tuition (HEFCE, 2004: 3). No public loan system was envisaged, but fees would be means-tested to exempt students from poorer families, or make them pay only a proportion.

Student support was provided in the form of grants and subsidised loans, but even the maximum amount of both together in most cases did not cover the cost of living. Amounts varied depending on whether students lived with or without their parents and in- or outside London. In 1998, the maximum grant ('mandatory award') and loan were about £2.000 per year each. A reform of student support was also envisaged, effective from 1999/2000 on. While the Dearing Report had recommended that the poorest students should continue to receive a grant covering their living expense, the government planned to move the entire support for living expenses towards a loan system with income-contingent repayment (Beverwijk, 1999; Eurydice, 2000c; HEFCE, 1999; Frans Kaiser et al., 2001).

9.3   Policy formulation

This section is somewhat different from its counterparts in the other countries in order to account for the unique features of the English case: policy formulation on HE in England in the period between 1998 and 2004 did not centre around adaptations in degree structures, and the Bologna process did not provide the main framework for it. This had several reasons. First, Bachelor and Masters degrees were already common prior to the Bologna process, so that indeed no immediate pressure for reform emanated from the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations. Second, as I show in this chapter, the Department in charge of HE did not itself promote a national response to European developments. Third, once actors in English HE policy finally started to perceive pressure to adjust, most saw these developments as a threat rather than an opportunity (see also Mangset, 2004; Teichler, 2005). For all these reasons, the reform of degree structures, and the Bologna process, did not develop into an overall lever for HE reform as they did in other countries. 1998 to 2004 was however characterised by heavy reform activity in English HE; and I map these changes in all seven dimensions to be able

to fully include England in the systematic comparisons in the later analysis (chapter 10). This seems relevant for a country that is not only a signatory of the Bologna declaration, but is also often cited as a model for adaptations in other European HE systems.

Major reference points for the reforms in England were no so much the Bologna process, but national documents such as the already discussed Dearing Report (1997) and the White Paper on "The Future of Higher Education" (DfES, 2003b). While these documents bundled existing reform ambitions to some extent, policy formulation in the period was characterised by many parallel reform threads, some of which partly overlapped or hindered each other. Presenting reform streams in a strictly chronological order therefore, does not do them justice. Where appropriate I bundle individual reform efforts into major themes and then follow them through time. The reader is referred to Appendix B6 for a strict chronology of events.

A natural starting point for an analysis of HE reforms in England is the Labour Party's rise to power and its response to the Dearing Report (section 9.3.1). As the Labour government came to power in May 1997 already and very soon started to initiate reforms, some overlap with the description of the institutional setting in 1998 was unavoidable. In the subsequent section, I follow the launch of the Foundation degree, changes in the QAA, and the reform of secondary education (section 9.3.3). From the 2003 White Paper and the Higher Education Act of 2004 (section 9.3.4), I turn to the concern with fair admissions, the reform of secondary education and some debates on curricular issues (section 9.3.5). The Bologna process comes in at two points: a first short intermezzo in 1998 and 1999 when the English Junior Minister Tessa Blackstone signed the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations (section 9.3.2); and second, the developments around the establishment of the High Level Policy Forum (HLPF) and the UK HE Europe Unit from 2003 onwards which fostered exchange and consensus-building on European issues and promoted awareness of European development in the UK (section 9.3.3). The English response to the Bologna process in a narrower sense is predominantly dealt with in these two sections though I look at all developments in English HE policy through the lens of the Bologna process and the dimensions of this study.

9.3.1 Government's response to Dearing and Teaching and HE Act 1998

The general elections in May 1997 brought the Labour Party into power; the first change in British government for eighteen years. David Blunkett became Secretary of State for Education and Employment and Tessa Blackstone his Minister of State with special responsibility for HE and Lifelong Learning (see section 9.1 for an explanation of these functions). Blunkett was a prominent figure in British politics. Blind since birth, he nevertheless managed to become Britain's

youngest councillor and rise through the ranks of the Labour party to Cabinet. Blackstone was a Labour life peer in the House of Lords and former university professor and administrator. Both remained in office throughout the Labour government's first term until June 2001. The Labour government remained in power throughout the period of investigation and HE policy in the period carried its signature, notably the attention paid to widening participation and the introduction of the foundation degree.

Only two months after the arrival of the new government, the Dearing Committee (1997) published its recommendations in a series of reports titled "HE in the learning society". The Committee had been set up with all-party support by the outgoing government to advise on the future of UK HE in the next 20 years. Its 93 recommendations focused on the themes of funding of HE, its expansion, and maintaining standards (see section 9.2). They were based on extensive stakeholder consultation and reflected a broad consensus in the sector. The proposals were addressed not only to the government, but to funding bodies, student unions, employers, and research councils; and would serve as a major reference for HE policy in the next few years.

The new Labour government responded immediately to the Report's recommendations on funding. It confirmed the commitment to make more resources available for maintaining and improving the quality of HE and for widening and increasing participation. Part of the package was that students should have to share around a quarter of the tuition costs. The main deviation from the Dearing Report was that no subsidised government loans would be available for the fees. Instead, the annual fees of £1000 would be means-tested.[296] The government also announced to review the system of maintenance grants and loans to ensure that students from poor families were not disadvantaged (DfEE, 1998a: 52-60), but envisaged relying more heavily than previously on loans. This plan was supported by CVCP and SCOP and resisted by the National Student Union. In September 1997 already, the government passed a first major funding package of an extra £165m to be spent in the academic year 1998/99, with £4m earmarked for widening participation (prnewswire, 1997). The new fee regime was formalised in a Teaching and Higher Education Bill.

In February 1998 the Department published its official response to the Dearing Report, titled "HE for the 21st Century" (DfEE, 1998a). It took up most recommendations, and announced concrete measures. Notably, the government confirmed its commitment to increase participation in HE and promised to lift the cap on student numbers in universities and colleges. It planned to channel funding to HEIs with a commitment to widening access, and concentrate growth in sub-degree provision, also in the FE colleges (ibid: 12-15). The QAA was asked to consult with stakeholders and recommend the ultimate details of the

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[296] …exempting one third of students fully and one third partially from payment.

framework for HE qualifications recommended by the Dearing Report until the year 2000. It was also asked to work with "academic subject groups" to define "threshold standards", "provide benchmark information", and to review the current regulations on degree-awarding powers (ibid: 24-26). The Labour Party's concern with employability and skills was reflected in a parallel Green Paper on Lifelong Learning, which mainly concerned vocational and adult education but included plans for paying more attention to these issues in HE (DfEE, 1998b). The paper provided the basis for intense stakeholder consultation (DfEE, 1999a).

The Teaching and Higher Education Bill was debated in Parliament in spring and summer and signed into law by Royal Assent in July 1998.

9.3.2 Blackstone's lonely signature on the Sorbonne Declaration in 1999

While the Teaching and Higher Education Bill was still discussed, the English Junior Minister for HE Tessa Blackstone was approached by the French Minister of Education at the time, Claude Allègre. He wanted the UK to join the Sorbonne declaration (1998), for which he had already secured support from his German and Italian counterparts. As Blackstone remembers:

> He said that he felt that there would be many advantages in having a rather more unified structure across the biggest four European countries, in other words: France, the UK, Germany and Italy. And he felt that the Anglo-Saxon model—which is how I think he called it at the time—was what ought to be adopted, with three stages: a Bachelor degree, followed by a Masters degree, followed by doctoral studies. I said that there is no problem about that as far as the UK was concerned because obviously *this was something we were already doing*. So I saw no difficulty in going along with it. (…) Some of the reasons for this initiative lay in the need to try to move forward and introduce some reforms in France. And I think there was also a wish on the part of the Italian and German ministers to reform their systems as well. (…) I saw it as a likely generator of some movement in the three other countries that signed. (…) And my motives for signing were basically very much *wanting to be helpful and constructive* in responding to a proposal from a fellow minister in one of our most important allies in Europe, in other words France. So—I had *only one slight reservation at the time, and that was that I did not want any commitment to be made about the length of these courses. And that was agreed at the time, that there was no problem about us preserving our three year undergraduate programmes and our one-year Masters degrees* [emphasis added](Interview Blackstone, 2004).

Baroness Blackstone thus signed the declaration based on the assumption that (1) it would have no impact on the UK but would help the three other signatories to address their problems, and notably (2) that the one-year length of most British Masters degrees was not put into question. While she consulted her signing with

some senior civil servants who participated in drafting the declaration text (Interview Bourke, 2004), there was virtually no consultation with Scotland, Northern Ireland, or Wales which she was representing,[297] nor with stakeholders. The signature went largely unnoticed by the British public, and did not have any further repercussions at the time. In retrospect, Blackstone admits that "what I didn't anticipate was that the process would move so unbelievably rapidly" (ibid). She also clarified that her signature was based on a unique understanding of the role of the government in HE. Referring to ECTS, she explained that

> Whereas in some countries, you could pass a law, saying that it has to exist, it just could not get through the UK Parliament. I think there would be uproar. It is something that the government expects the HE sector to sort out and produce sensible outcomes. But it could not prescribe this. And that will always be the case in our system (ibid).

In other words, while Baroness Blackstone was supportive of the call for credits, and the reference to ECTS in the Declaration, she did not intend to nor indeed could she, force their use upon HEIs. The same also held for any other possible policy implied in the Declaration. Her views were shared by the sector as the following quote of a university Vice Chancellor shows:

> Here in the UK of course we are proudly autonomous, we would not be forced by the ministry to do anything (Interview Boucher, 2004).

Another motivation for Baroness Blackstone to sign the declaration was to foster the international competitiveness of European countries:

> I thought it was desirable that we should build this common framework. I thought that it would probably strengthen Europe vis-à-vis the United States, which was certainly something that we all needed to think about (Interview Blackstone, 2004).

This fact is worth noting, as the question of whether a stronger association of the UK with the 'Continent' through the Bologna process was beneficial, would later turn out not to be unanimously agreed among English HE actors.

A year later in May 1999 Blackstone signed the Bologna declaration, again on behalf of the entire UK.[298] This time some informal exchange took place between

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[297] The Department has never been responsible for HE in Scotland or Northern Ireland, not even before the devolution in May 1999. However, there was a long-standing convention that the Department would speak for the UK as a whole vis-à-vis Europe.

[298] While the first elections for the devolved National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament were held in the same month, both only started working in July 1999 (see footnote 267).

the Department and the CVCP beforehand, but again the event did not receive much attention among stakeholders or in the general public. While the Department did consult informally on the Prague communiqué, it actually took until 2003 before the Bologna process became an issue in English HE; showing first in the creation of the High Level Policy Forum (HLPF) in early 2003 and the linked launch of the UK HE Europe Unit in January 2004.

9.3.3   Foundation degree, changes in the QAA and in secondary education

This section traces the major domestic issues in English HE policy from the passing of the Teaching and Higher Education Act of 1998 to the publication of the government White Paper "The Future of Higher Education" in 2003, which marked the preparation of the next major legislative project, the Higher Education Act of 2004. These issues were (1) the launch of the Foundation degree, (2) major developments and changes of the QAA's policies, and (3) a long-standing debate about a major reform of secondary education that would have important repercussions for the first years of HE.

The re-election of the Labour government in June 2001 provided the occasion for a major restructuring of the Department and a change of Secretaries of State. In June 2001, the employment functions of the DfEE were transferred to a newly created Department for Work and Pensions, and the DfEE became the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Blunkett was promoted to Home Secretary and his Minister for School Standards, Estelle Morris—herself a former teacher—followed him as Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Blackstone changed posts as well, and became Arts Minister. These changes did not however, change the continuity of the Department's policies over the period.

FOUNDATION DEGREE. The launch of the Foundation degree has to be seen in the context of the Labour government's increasing and widening participation agenda, specifically the target of 50% of all 18 to 30 year-olds getting a chance to enter HE by 2010. At the time this target was formally included in the Labour Party's election manifesto in 2001 (Labour Party, 2001: HE - a world leader), that percentage was 43%. The idea of such a target did go back to an earlier initiative of Prime Minister Tony Blair in February 1999 however, who had initially thought of the even more ambitious goal of reaching it "by the end of next parliament: 2006-07" (Hill, 2005).[299] It was quite clear from the outset that the

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[299] The target was first publicly formulated at the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth in September 1999. In his speech, Tony Blair said: "In today's world, there is no such thing as too clever. The more you know, the further you will go…..Why is it only now we have lifted the cap on student numbers and 100,000 more will go to university in the next 2 years, 700,000 more to further education? So today I set a target of 50 per cent of young adults going into higher education in the next century" (Blair, 1999).

target could not imply 50% of young people doing Honours degrees. Instead, the two-year Foundation degree was conceived as the main means to achieve the target. Additionally, it was also said to help address the intermediate (technician) level skills gap. The new qualification was originally referred to as 'associate degree' following the US example, and conceived as a "vocational route within HE which will be a valued alternative to a first degree" (Blunkett in ibid). While preparing for immediate entry into the labour market, the Foundation degree should also serve as a stepping stone towards an Honours degree, thus supporting New Labour's agenda to stimulate students from 'non-traditional backgrounds' to achieve their potential. It was expected that students who had attained a Foundation degree could "progress to an honours degree in one and one third years", such as in a "a summer school (…) and one year of further full time study" (DfEE, 2000a). Most Foundation degrees were to be provided by Colleges of FE and HE in partnership with universities that would validate them. They were financed with additional government funds provided through HEFCE, and their quality was assured through the QAA. A key feature of the new degrees was the intention to closely involve employers in their conception and delivery, and make sure they would respond to clearly defined needs of the labour market. The Foundation degree initiative was completely independent from the Bologna process, taken neither because nor in spite of it—Bologna was simply not on the radar screen of those who conceived it (Interview Walls, 2004).

In February 2000, Blunkett launched a Consultation Paper on the new qualification (DfEE, 2000b) and in July HEFCE invited the first partnerships of HEIs, employers, and FE colleges to bid to develop prototypes (HEFCE, 2000a, 2000b). The first Foundation degrees were launched at the start of the academic year 2001/02 (the government made funding available for 2,000 places in 10-20 partnerships), and they were rolled out as of 2002/03 (DfES, 2004b).

The Foundation degree was a Labour Party initiative and was received with mixed feelings by the HE sector; moreover, it went against the recommendations of the Dearing Report (1997: Chapter 10.29).[300] While the increasing and widening participation agenda was supported by CVCP, SCOP, and the NUS, marketing the new qualification as a 'degree' was disputed. As the Honours degree was traditionally the first degree, this name was prone to the misunderstanding that a

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[300] The report ‚Choosing to Change' proposed the introduction of an Associate Degree as an additional level of successful achievement below the first degree. Our enquiries found minimal support for the introduction of such a qualification. It is seen as devaluing the term 'degree' and thought likely to become a second class qualification which would not be credible with employers or overseas, especially in mainland Europe. There was, moreover, the suspicion that it was a cost-driven proposal paving the way to a 'two-year entitlement', so that students would be persuaded that it was a normal endpoint for a majority of undergraduates. (…) We, therefore, support the development of recognised exit points within a framework of qualifications, but not the introduction of additional qualifications such as (…) an associate degree" (Dearing Report, 1997: Chapter 10.29-31)

first degree could now be reached within two years (EducationNews, 2003). This discussion is also reflected in the following quote by a university Vice Chancellor:

> We have to be careful. This is not a first degree. This is not a degree in the sense of a normal university qualification. This is only at level I or slightly above[301]. Although it has got the name 'degree', it is not a degree. We would not accept it as a degree. We would not accept it other than as a credential to an undergraduate programme (Interview Boucher, 2004).

Moreover, the relationship between the new Foundation degrees and the existing Higher National Diplomas (HND) was unclear, leading to fears that the Foundation degrees were "just a cynical re-branding of HNDs and HNCs", and that they were "the end of HNDs" (DfEE, 2000a). While the Foundation degree was not initially conceived as a replacement for existing qualifications such as the HND, they came to subsume many of them later. In addition to the new name and broad-scale marketing, the main difference compared to the HND was a major effort to stimulate employer participation and ensure that the qualifications met labour market demand, which was not always the case for the existing HNDs. Ensuring sufficient labour-market and student demand was thus one of the major concerns related to the project (HEFCE, 2000a: Annex B) and would remain so in the next few years (Thomson, 2005). Finally, traditional research universities made it clear that "the exact duration of the progression period [into an Honours programme] should remain an academic rather than a bureaucratic judgement" (HEFCE, 2000a: Annex B, 27). From the perspective of the Department, the Foundation Degree initiative was ultimately about trying to "change this dreadful culture in the UK where there is a prejudice against vocational qualifications as opposed to academic qualifications", and to "integrate academic and work-based learning" (Minister Alan Johnson in MacLeod, 2004).

CHANGE IN QAA POLICIES. The second important reform strand in the period was the work of the QAA and a fall out with HEIs over its approach, which led to the resignation of the QAA's Director in August 2001 and a major change of method effective from July 2002. In January 2001, the QAA published the first results of the work that it had been assigned following the Dearing Report. Its core was a national qualifications framework that was part of a broader 'academic infrastructure' including 'subject benchmark statements', 'programme specifications', and a 'code of practice' developed in the years between 1999 and 2001.

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[301] …in the national qualifications framework that was agreed in 2001, see later in this section.

The "Framework for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland" (FHEQ) (QAA, 2001a)[302] was the result of extensive consultation with HEIs and students based on the Dearing Committee's draft proposal (Dearing Report, 1997: Chapter 10). The main issue of debate was the number of levels in the framework within undergraduate and graduate education, and their definition in terms of credits. While Dearing had proposed eight HE levels (H1-8; i.e, Certificate, Diploma, Bachelors degree, Honours degree, Higher Honours/Postgraduate Conversion Diploma, Masters degree, MPhil, and Doctorate), a consensus was only reached on five levels (Certificate, Intermediate, Honours, Masters, and Doctorate). Whereas Dearing had thought to base these levels on 120 credits[303] per year of full-time studies, the framework was ultimately only verbally defined in terms of 'qualification descriptors' (QAA, 2001a).

No consensus could be reached at the undergraduate level to assign a separate level to the 'ordinary Bachelors degree' which Dearing had originally conceived for students who would follow a broader curriculum and thus not qualify for the Honours level in three years.[304] Most HEIs used credit systems with three levels however, which ran counter to Dearing's proposal of moving the Honours degree to level four. Therefore, the 'ordinary Bachelors degree' and the 'Diploma' proposed by Dearing were instead lumped together as an 'Intermediate' level. It proved similarly impractical to clearly circumscribe three discrete levels within the Masters phase. In practice, there were many shades of grey between programmes that would qualify as postgraduate conversion or as Masters degrees etc. Consequently, it was agreed to have only one Masters level, encompassing Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas, Masters degrees, and the MPhil (Interview Harris, 2004).[305]

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[302] A separate framework was agreed for Scotland (QAA, 2001b), mainly because Scottish students followed one year less of secondary education and a broader secondary education curriculum. They therefore needed four years of full-time study to reach the Honours level (which was called Master's degree in the Scottish context).

[303] These were English, not ECTS credits.

[304] Dearing's original proposal was very much based on the concern of how to reconcile the aim of broadening the undergraduate curriculum with the fact that the traditional 'honours degree' was achieved in three years. To this end, the proposal was that students could either achieve an Honours degree in a straight specialist route of three years, or follow a broader curriculum of four years. The 'ordinary Bachelors degree' would then have certified a lower level of specialisation after three years. In practice however, HEIs used the 'ordinary Bachelor' to represent a failed honours. The FHEQ changed that, so that HEIs would now positively define expectations for the award of the 'ordinary Bachelor degree'. Its level was basically set to include all coursework for the Honours degree except for the final thesis or research project, which would normally take about six months (Interview Harris, 2004).

[305] Instead, the QAA worked to establish a distinction between 'postgraduate' programmes—which had to be more demanding than Honours programmes —and 'graduate' programmes that only had to be taken after graduation, but could imply a complete change of subject (Interview Harris, 2004).

There was also some discussion on the extended undergraduate programmes in Science and Engineering directly leading to degrees such as MEng or MChem. While Dearing saw them as 'Higher Honours' level, it was now agreed that they had to fit the Masters descriptor to remove the ambiguity about the status of these degrees.[306] With respect to "the MAs granted by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge" however, the framework explicitly noted that they were "not academic qualifications" (QAA, 2001a: 2). In July 2000, the Chief Executive of the QAA had been even more explicit, calling the 'honorary' MA from Oxbridge a "misleading anomaly" (Clare, 2000).

Finally, the definition of levels in terms of credits was also heavily debated, but institutions could not agree upon a common system. As Nick Harris, Director of the Development and Enhancement Group at the QAA, explains:

> Credit levels are backed up with intensely detailed level descriptors and all sorts of rules and regulations. And we were going into it from a starting position of 120 institutions, of which 60-70 had credit systems, all of which were different, all of which had very detailed rules and regulations internally within institutions. It would have been a bureaucratic nightmare. (…) And those three levels reflected roughly speaking the first three years (Interview Harris, 2004).

Basically, the credit issue was deferred to another round of negotiations, but the discussions had nevertheless brought the sector closer to a common credit system. Such systems already existed among the few HEIs in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. In November 2001, a joint initiative of the credit consortia of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland published guidelines documenting far-reaching agreement among them (EWNI, 2001).

'Subject benchmark statements' and 'programme specifications' were two complementary parts of the 'academic infrastructure' that helped break down the FHEQ into individual subjects and programmes. Subject benchmark statements described the expected standards of degrees in specific subject areas; they were agreed among disciplinary networks of academics with facilitation from the QAA.[307] While they were not prescriptive, HEIs had to demonstrate to the QAA

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[306] Behind this decision was a range of arguments including the perception that the level of A-level entrants in Mathematics and Physics had decreased and universities therefore needed four years to reach an adequate level for a first degree; and also that the integrated four-year programmes allowed for synergies and catch-up, which then ensured that the Masters level was nevertheless reached after four years. The main argument for the extended undergraduate programmes however, was employer demand.

[307] In the words of the QAA (2003a:12), "Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe the conceptual framework that gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the techniques and skills needed to develop understanding in the subject".

that they had taken them into account. Programme specifications referred to individual programmes at the institutional level; teaching staff had to document the aims of a programme and make explicit the curricular design.[308]

A 'code of practice' laid down the practices that HEIs were expected to follow internally to assure the quality of their programmes. In the words of the QAA, it set out "guidelines and good practice relating to the management of academic standards and quality" (QAA, 2003a:12). Finally, the QAA also assisted HEIs and academics to "develop Progress File policies and practices" (ibid). Progress Files had been recommended by the Dearing Report to help students document and reflect their learning.

In the first few years after its establishment in 1997, the QAA performed the institutional audits it had inherited from the former CVCP's Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the former HEFCE Quality Assessment Divisions' subject reviews side by side (see section 9.2.3). HEIs were increasingly dissatisfied with the level of intrusiveness of the QAA's method however, which according to them, "amounted—and was designed to amount—to a massive undermining of the academic autonomy of individual HEIs" (Alderman, 2001). Particularly the Russell Group of leading research universities (see section 9.2.1) and SCOP called for a confinement of the QAA to institutional audits. The subject reviews inherited from HEFCE were seen as far too costly and bureaucratic, and moreover ineffective (Furedi, 2001; Interview Bourke, 2004; Interview Floud, 2004).[309] In response to mounting levels of criticism, John Randall resigned from his position as Chief Executive of the QAA on 21 August 2001 and was followed by Peter Williams, the former Director of the institutional audit processes inherited from the HEQC. Under the new leadership, the QAA abandoned the subject reviews and successively came to rely entirely on institutional audits.

The new methodology for England was developed in partnership with HEFCE, Universities UK (formerly called CVCP), SCOP, and the Department; and was published in July 2002 (QAA, 2002). The new institutional audits focused on three main areas:

(1) "the effectiveness of an institution's internal quality assurance structures and mechanisms",

(2) "the accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information that an institution publishes about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards", and

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[308] In the words of the QAA, "programme specifications are a concise description of the intended outcomes of learning from a higher education programme, and the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated" (QAA, 2006).

[309] In the words of the former President of Universities UK, Roderick Floud, subject reviews were "an extremely expensive case of showing that everything was all right" (Interview Floud, 2004).

(3) "several examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work at the level of the programme (…) or across the institution as a whole (…)" (ibid: 3).

Institutional audits were introduced progressively from 2002/03, while subject reviews were successively phased out. In the transition period from 2002 to 2004, the QAA still undertook "development-focused engagements at discipline-level", "intended to offer institutions an opportunity to test, in co-operation with the Agency, their internal procedures for assuring quality and standards" (ibid: 2).

REFORM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION. The third major strand of reform between 1998 and 2003 with relevance for HE was the ongoing debate about the reform of secondary education. In September 2000, a first part of the reform was implemented ('Curriculum 2000'), following the earlier recommendations of Ron Dearing—not in the 1997 report, but in the earlier report on secondary curriculum in 1996 (Dearing, 1996)—to broaden learning at that stage (see section 9.2.5). Pupils now started with so-called Advanced Subsidiary (AS) levels, which corresponded to the first year of the traditional two-year A-level course. They could decide a year later whether to complete a full A-level qualification by taking the second half of the course (so-called A2 levels), or take another AS-level course to study more subjects in less depth (LSDA, 2006). This reform was only the first step of a larger, widely debated project to integrate all secondary education into one fully integrated 'baccalaureate-style qualification'. The Department's Green Paper "14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards" (DfES, 2002) published in February 2002, set out the vision of a new secondary education curriculum. It would encompass A levels as well as existing vocational qualifications such as (General) National Vocational Qualifications ((G)NVQ), allow students to more flexibly combine academic and vocational learning, and ensure that all pupils mastered certain key skills. In summer 2002, a scandal over broad-scale, systematic grade inflation of A-level qualifications referred to as the 'A-level grading crisis' threw a bad light on the entire reform project and triggered an official inquiry by the former Director of the national education inspectorate (Office for Standards in Education, Ofsted), Mike Tomlinson.

In October 2002, Morris resigned, saying that she "did not feel up to the job" (BBC news, 2003)[310], and was followed by Charles Clarke as new Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Clarke, a veteran labour politician with upper class origins, had been Minister without Portfolio and Labour Party Chair since 2001, and had already been Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for School Standards in the Department from July 1998 to July 1999.

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[310] Thereby Morris delivered on a commitment she had given as Minister for Schools Standards in 1999 to resign if the Government's literacy and numeracy targets were not met by 2002.

9.3.4 The 1993 White Paper and the Higher Education Act 2004

Clarke stayed in office throughout the investigated period until December 2004, when he was made Home Secretary. Up until June 2003, his Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education continued to be Margaret Hodge, who was then followed by Alan Johnson. The dominant theme of Clarke's term of office was the introduction of flexible undergraduate tuition fees as part of a wider plan to further increase the funding of HE and achieve the 50% participation target. The Department set these plans out in a White Paper which prepared the Higher Education Act 2004. Under Clarke, HE policy gained in profile significantly as the reform of student fees became a widely debated political issue. The Department also started to pay more attention to the international dimension of HE. The increased importance of HE within the Department materialised in an internal restructuring to create a separate HE Directorate distinct from FE. As of January 2004, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds Sir Alan Wilson headed the new HE Directorate, which started to develop an international strategy for HE.

In January 2003, the Department published the White Paper "The Future of Higher Education" (DfES, 2003b). Its main thrust was to bundle three issues: (1) securing adequate funding for HE, (2) raising and widening participation, and (3) reforming the fee regime. On funding, the government renewed its commitment to further increase funding per student, and stressed funding research excellence and widening participation. It confirmed the target "to increase participation towards 50% of those aged 18-30, mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees" (ibid: 7). Specifically, this meant that the government would fund additional places for students in Foundation degrees but keep the numbers studying traditional Honours degrees steady. The White Paper also announced a set of measures to ensure fair access, with the explicit aim to increase "the proportion [of students] coming from lower-income families" (ibid: 8). Among these measures was "requiring universities to draw up an Access Agreement to improve access for disadvantaged students, before they are able to increase the level of fee they ask students to pay", and

> appointing an independent Access Regulator [later referred to as Office for Fair Access (OFFA)] to oversee these agreements, to promote wider access and to ensure that admissions procedures are fair, professional and transparent (ibid).

The Department framed the unpopular plan to introduce flexible student fees between £0 and £3,000 as a necessary contribution to achieving the common good:

> There is no easy, painless way to put our universities and student finance system on a sustainable basis. If we duck the difficult decisions needed, the risk of decline will increase and students and the country at large will suffer (ibid: 5).

It also tied the increase of fees to the introduction of a national, publicly subsidised income-contingent loan system with zero interest, and an income threshold of £15,000 for repayment. Finally, it proposed to reintroduce modest maintenance grants of up to £1,000 a year for the poorest students, and pay for part of their fees.[311] Overall, the plans thus also included some amelioration of the situation for students compared to the current system.

In the context of the expansion agenda, the White Paper announced that HEFCE would work with stakeholders to scale up the use of credits, which it saw as a means to improve the flexibility for students, notably in a context of work-based and part-time study. In this context, the government highlighted the value of local credit networks in which a university works together with local colleges of FE (ibid: 64).

In addition to these main themes, the White Paper also initiated a change of legislation on degree awarding powers and university title. It proposed to waive the requirement of research degree awarding power as a condition for university status, arguing that "it is clear that good scholarship, in the sense of remaining aware of the latest research and thinking within a subject, is essential for good teaching, but not that it is necessary to be active in cutting-edge research to be an excellent teacher" (ibid: 54). The paper envisaged that starting with the academic year 2004/05, "the University title (…) [would be] awarded on the basis of taught degree awarding powers, student numbers, and the range of subjects offered" (ibid: 55), following a review and a sector consultation led by the QAA.

Finally, the White Paper reconsidered an option discussed before, to introduce compressed Honours degrees to be achieved in only two years of studies by making full use of the summer break. This proposal was however not followed up (ibid: 65).

The Department's Paper "Widening participation in Higher Education" of March 2003 (DfES, 2003e) complemented the White Paper, specifying further the remit of the proposed "Office for Fair Access" (OFFA). The creation of this office was conceived as a compensatory measure for the introduction of variable student fees; in fact it can be interpreted as

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[311] The grant that was actually introduced was up to £1,500 per year.

> the political price for selling the notion of higher fees—and particular the principle of variable fees—to parts of the Labour party, whose left wing instincts rebelled against the possible inequalities to which this would give rise (Interview Bekhradhnia, 2004).

The Department envisaged to vest OFFA with far-reaching powers, such as to "direct HEFCE to impose a financial penalty and, ultimately, not to renew an access agreement" (ibid: 4) if an institution did not live up to its promises on fair admissions. The paper also announced that it had "asked Professor Steven Schwartz, Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University, to lead a team to identify good practice in admissions" (ibid: 2). Well aware that the traditional autonomy of English HEIs regarding admissions precluded legal measures, the Department opted for this 'soft approach' to pursue its aims. In the terms of reference, the Committee was asked

> to report to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the options which English institutions providing Higher Education should consider adopting in assessing the merit of applicants and their achievement and potential for different types of courses (DfES, 2003d) (see section 9.3.5 for more detail on the Schwartz report).

The White Paper was not discussed with HEIs and students before publication, and took them more or less by surprise. Universities UK and SCOP published their responses in April 2003 (SCOP, 2003a; UUK, 2003b). Generally, they welcomed the thrust of the government's plans, and applauded its commitment to close the funding gap. In this context, Universities UK highlighted the 2002 spending review where it had made a case for an additional funds of £8 billion for English universities (UUK, 2002) and received £3.7 billion; which it acknowledged as a "a substantial sum" (UUK, 2003b:2). In its spending review submission for 2004 Universities UK had asked for an additional £8.8 billion over the next two years (UUK, 2004b). In light of these funding needs, Universities UK was supportive of the government's plans to "increase the cap on tuition fees" (UUK, 2003b:2). SCOP also supported the plans in principle, but called "on the Government to monitor the impact (…) to ensure these do not work against widening participation" (SCOP, 2003a:3).

Both Universities UK and SCOP welcomed the government's continued commitment to the 50% participation target but criticised the preoccupation with Foundation degrees. Universities UK was also critical of OFFA; not of the aims but the means by which the government hoped to achieve them; it feared limiting the autonomy of HEIs and being overly bureaucratic. It therefore expressed the intention to work closely with the Department on the design of the new agency's remit.

Universities UK criticised the Department's plans on university title and demanded that "there must be a requirement for demonstration of significant research activity" (ibid: 12) as a precondition for a university title. Important arguments were the reputation of British universities in Europe and the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), which had emphasised the links between teaching and research. Different from Universities UK, SCOP (2003a: 2) welcomed the Department's "proposals for changes to the criteria for University title".

Both SCOP and Universities UK were concerned with a tendency of the White Paper "to limit and define the pattern and role of institutions" (SCOP, 2003a:1) instead of supporting the existing complexity and dynamics of the sector; and stressed that "research concentration has gone far enough" (UUK, 2003b:2).
In relation to the Bologna Process, Universities UK criticised that although

> the UK government wishes to be at the heart of Europe and has taken a lead in the Bologna process and development of the European HE Area, (…) there is no mention of the UK's commitments in Europe in the White paper (ibid: 13).

Among actors in HE policy, the fact that European issues, and the Bologna process in particular, did not feature in the White Paper was widely interpreted as a clear sign of the low awareness and priority attached to these themes by the Department (Interview Copland, 2004; Interview Floud, 2004). Among the general public, the plans for student fees raised the most controversy and in fact constituted a real test to the inner unity of the Labour party (DfES, 2003c). Remarkably enough, Prime Minister Blair was prepared to risk his future and that of his government to push the bill through Parliament. In spite of the criticism, the plans set out in the White Paper were translated into a Draft Higher Education Act 2004 largely unaltered and were submitted to Parliament in January 2004. During the Parliamentary debates in the spring of 2004, the dispute about OFFA resurfaced (Baty, 2004b; Hill, 2004; Hodges, 2004) and Universities UK threatened to withdraw support for the HE Bill if the government would not formally restrict OFFA's powers to prevent it from "interfering with universities admissions policies and procedures" (Baty, 2004a). The National Student Union was opposed to the variable fees as a matter of principle (NUS, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d). The Higher Education Act 2004 ultimately passed Parliament with a tight majority of five—in spite of the Labour party majority of 160+—and received Royal Assent on the first of July. It laid the legal basis for the introduction of variable fees and the establishment of OFFA, while other themes of the White Paper were pursued through a range of policy instruments such as HEFCE's funding mechanisms, the QAA's procedures, and dialogue with the sector.

In August 2004, the Department also revised the criteria "for the grant of taught degree-awarding powers, research degree-awarding powers and university title", taking effect as of 1 September 2004 (DfES, 2004a).[312] In response to the criticism from Universities UK, the government had sharpened the definition of "active scholarship" of HE staff but stuck to the plan that taught degree-awarding powers in conjunction with minimum requirements for the number of enrolled students would be sufficient as a basis for university title. The government also abandoned the requirement on the minimum number of subjects to be covered be a university.

9.3.5   Debate on fair admissions, secondary education, and curricular issues

In parallel with the consultation of the White Paper and the preparation of the Higher Education Act, three major committees engaged in consultation with the HE sector. In addition to the Schwartz Committee on fair admissions, the Department commissioned Mike Tomlinson to chair a Working Group on the reform of secondary education, and Universities UK and SCOP asked the Burgess Committee to advise on a range of curricular issues, notably "measuring and recording student achievement".

SCHWARTZ COMMITTEE ON FAIR ADMISSIONS. The Schwartz Committee on fair admissions began work in June 2003 and published its final report in September 2004 after two rounds of stakeholder consultation (Schwartz, 2004). The report confirmed the autonomy of HEIs regarding admissions but made a range of recommendations on improving the transparency and fairness of the admissions system. Its key concern was how to identify the potential of students from disadvantaged backgrounds that did not show in examination grades, and how to "minimise barriers for applicants" (ibid: 8). In this context, Schwartz recommended introducing a universal aptitude test that would complement the A-level grades. He also called for moving to an admissions system based on 'post-qualification applications' (PQA), where students would no longer receive offers from universities based on their predicted grades but on their actual grades. The background of that recommendation was that pupils who were too modest regarding their expected A-level results currently did not maximise their potential when applying. Finally, the Schwartz Report "identified the lack of a national credit transfer system as a 'problem' causing barriers to students wishing to transfer between institutions" (Burgess Report, 2004: 33).

In their various responses, both Universities UK and SCOP welcomed the "examples of good practice" provided by the report (UUK, 2004c), but stressed

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[312] …replacing the comparably minor revisions from 29 Oct 1999 following the Dearing Report (DfEE, 1999b).

that the government should continue to respect institutional autonomy, that the "principles in this review are voluntary and not regulatory" (SCOP, 2004), and that institutions were basically already doing what the Committee called for. They welcomed the move to PQA in principle, but highlighted problems with practical implementation (SCOP, 2004; UUK, 2004d). Both called for taking into consideration the recommendations of the parallel Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform (see below). A main concern voiced by SCOP was that the contribution and experience of non-university HE did not receive sufficient attention (SCOP, 2003b).

WORKING GROUP ON 14-19 REFORM. In parallel to the Schwartz Admissions Review which was part of the project framed by the White Paper, the government continued to pursue the reform of broadening secondary education (see section 9.3.3). Following up on the consultation of the earlier Green Paper on "14-19 reform" (DfES, 2002), the Department commissioned Mike Tomlinson to chair a "Working Group on 14-19 Reform" (DfES, 2003a) which should operationalise the vision for an integrated 'baccalaureate-style qualification' that would increase flexibility for students, encourage a wider percentage of the age group to participate in upper secondary education, integrate vocational options, and ensure consistent standards and the mastery of certain key skills by all.

The Working Group began in February 2003 and published a final report in October 2004 (Tomlinson, 2004) after two rounds of consultation. It recommended integrating the wide range of existing secondary education qualifications into an overarching "diploma framework" with different levels. Within the framework, students would have more choice to either specialise or combine a range of academic and vocational topics. At the same time, 'core learning for all' would ensure a "minimum standard in mathematics, English and computing" (ibid: 3). The Group envisaged ten years for the full implementation of their proposals. Both SCOP and Universities UK welcomed the main thrust of the review (SCOP, 2003b; UUK, 2004a, 2004e). Universities UK was particularly supportive of the plans to improve key skills of applicants, and hoped that the reform would make it easier for HEIs to identify suitable applicants. Their main concern was that the diploma "stretches sufficiently the highest achieving students" (UUK, 2004e). In spite of the broad support for the reform in the sector, the Labour government later decided to shelve it for fear of public protests against the alleged scrapping of the beloved A-level "gold standard" (The Economist, 2006).

BURGESS REPORT. The Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group, lead by Professor Robert Burgess, was commissioned by Universities UK and SCOP in October 2003 with support from HEFCE

> to review the recommendations from the Government White Paper (…) relating specifically to recording student achievement, value added, degree classifications and credit systems (Burgess Report, 2004).

It represented a soft way to forge consensus among HEIs on a number of delicate issues related to the reform of teaching, learning, and curricula. While the Burgess Report was only published in November 2004, the consultations influenced views in the sector well before then. Two key recommendations were that the Honours degree classifications system should be revised, and that English HEIs should adopt a common credit framework. On degree classifications, the Report concluded that the current distinction of Honours degrees into 'First, Upper and Lower Second, Third, Pass and Fail' had "outlived its usefulness" (ibid: 4) and should be replaced by an alternative for which it suggested different options. On credits, the Report called upon the sector to

> work towards a common further and higher education credit system for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, articulating effectively with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (ibid: 5).

The Report highlighted the differences between the ambitious initiatives in the UK to build regional and national credit frameworks that included credit levels, agreements on module size and value, and progression routes; and the much more basic functioning of ECTS. It therefore concluded that the UK could make a major contribution to the further development of ECTS in the context of a European qualifications framework (ibid: 40-41). Three years after the establishment of a credit-free national qualifications framework under the leadership of the QAA (2001a), the issue was thus taken up again, and to a new stage. Referring to the Burgess report and to "European developments" among other things, in December 2004 the Department commissioned HEFCE to advise "how we can make rapid progress towards a national credit framework for HE, to be in place by 2010" (Clarke, 2004).

9.3.6   Waking up to Bologna: High Level Policy Forum and Europe Unit

In portraying English policy formulation in HE, this chapter has so far only touched upon the Bologna process in passing. For a long time, Junior Minister Blackstone's signature on the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations did not have further consequences. English policy formulation was triggered by issues other than European developments. So far, the European context only played an indirect role in the debates on 'university title', qualification frameworks, and credit systems. By contrast, many of the English HE reform projects were highly relevant from a European perspective and resonated with what other countries were doing in the context of the Bologna process. This section concentrates on the English response to the Bologna process, tracing its origins, forms and themes; from the developments that led to establishment of the 'High Level Policy Forum'

in early 2003 through the launch of the 'Europe Unit' in January 2004 to the debates that intensified in English HE after that.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HIGH LEVEL POLICY FORUM. Among the actors in English HE policy, awareness of the European context—and the Bologna process specifically—started to increase slowly as of 2002. Several factors contributed to this development. Since 2001, Universities UK President Roderick Floud was highly sensitised to the European dimension through longstanding cooperation in the Association of European Universities (CRE)—one of the two predecessors of the European University Association (EAU)—and actively worked to raise awareness among universities. Another factor was that other European countries moved ahead with implementing tangible reforms in the context of the Bologna process, and representatives of Universities UK, the QAA, SCOP and the NUS started meeting each other increasingly often in European forums abroad. Finally, the new Secretary of State, Clarke, was very open to international issues (Interview Floud, 2004; Interview Weavers, 2004; Interview Wilson, 2004).

All these factors contributed to an initiative led by the head of HEFCE, Howard Newby, to establish a UK-wide High Level Policy Forum (HLPF) in which key sector organisations—among them Universities UK, SCOP, NUS, the QAA, the Department and the UK's HE funding councils[313]—would exchange views on European issues and possibly formulate shared positions. From the beginning, the HLPF was geared towards jointly developing positions of "the UK HE sector" vis-à-vis the rest of Europe rather than formulating national policies to be implemented within the UK. Nevertheless, it contributed a lot to raising awareness of European issues among national actors. From April 2003 the HLPF began to meet in bi-annual intervals with a rotating chairpersonship. As of December 2003, and in direct relation with the launch of the UK HE Europe Unit (see below), the HLPF was supported by a European Co-ordinating Group (ECG) that united a similar set of actors at officer level and met more frequently. In addition to the members of the HLPF, this group also included the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) and the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council.[314]

In September, the Berlin Ministerial Summit provided the first occasion for a joint position statement of the members of the HLPF on the Bologna process

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[313] Membership successively increased and by 2005, included the UK Research Councils, UUK's National Councils—Higher Education Wales and Universities Scotland—, the Office of Science and Technology (OST), the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Wellcome Trust.

[314] By 2005, ECG members (in addition to those represented on the HLPF) included the Association of UK Higher Education European Officers (HEURO), the Association of University Teachers (AUT), the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DELNI), the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), the British Academy, the Engineering Council, the Royal Society, and the UK Research Office (UKRO).

(HLPF, 2003).[315] They named three main motivations for the UK[316] to support the process: increasing the outward mobility of British students, enhancing the attractiveness of European HE vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and strengthening the link between the European HE area (EHEA) and the European research area (ibid: §1-4). At the same time, the paper clearly expressed three main reservations that would also dominate the later British debate on the Bologna process, namely (1) European quality assurance, (2) degree structure and length, and (3) credits and qualification frameworks.

European quality assurance. The first reservation concerned the increasing influence of the European Commission in the Bologna process, particularly with respect to quality assurance (QA). The HLPF made it clear that generally, "the creation of the EHEA must continue to be through an 'intergovernmental' process", and "respect (…) the diversity of HE systems in Europe" (ibid: §5). On quality assurance, too, the HLPF was wary of the Commission's influence, making it clear that "the UK would resist attempts to introduce a European system of external course evaluation, a single pan-European quality system or form of course-based system" (ibid: §9).[317] Related to that, the HLPF made a strong case for the UK approach to quality assurance, based on the experience that led to the recent reform of the QAA's methods (see section 9.3.3), and explained that it would not want to change it because of pressure emanating from the Bologna process or the Commission:

> We emphasize that any future co-operation in European QA should not be overly bureaucratic or burdensome by adding further intrusive layers. In the UK, we have experience of the costs which such systems can so easily impose, directly or indirectly, on institutions. QA systems must be both useful and cost effective. (…) The UK's experience with course-based review is that it is unnecessarily bureaucratic and costly. Where institutions have strong internal quality procedures, as in the UK, institutional based review/audit has proved to be effective and cost-efficient (ibid: §9).

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[315] The Berlin Communiqué was signed by Ivan Lewis, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Vocational Education, on behalf of the responsible Minister for HE, Kim Howells, who would in turn have represented the Secretary of State, Charles Clarke. At the time, the preparation of the Higher Education Act 2004 was clearly much higher on the agenda of the Department than the Bologna process.

[316] While this chapter focuses on the English response to the Bologna process, wherever relevant, positions have been formulated by the UK as a whole, I will also speak of the UK. This is the case for the views of the HLPF, the ECG, and later, the Europe Unit.

[317] A similar concern had been expressed in an earlier position statement of Universities UK in response to the communication from the European Commission on "The role of universities in the Europe of knowledge" (UUK, 2003a).

Behind these statements was the perception that two approaches were favoured in the quality assurance working groups related to the Bologna process, such as ENQA (see chapter 5 on 'Europe'): programme accreditation and a European-wide structure for the mutual recognition of QA decisions. Both run contrary to British preferences and experience. In October 2004, these worries were confirmed, as the European Commission should indeed make an advance for a European-wide structure for QA, the "Proposal for a Recommendation of the Council and of the European Parliament on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education" (European Commission, 2004); though it did not particularly favour programme accreditation.

Degree structure and length. The second reservation concerned the degree structure and length of British Masters programmes in particular. While the HLPF expressed support for a two-cycle structure, it emphasised that it should accommodate the diversity of existing degrees and that actors in the UK did not intend to adjust the length of their Masters programmes. In this context, it highlighted the

> conclusions of the Helsinki conference on 'Masters level degrees' [(2003)] which noted that while masters degree programmes normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits, the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at masters level (one year).

The document went on to explain that "most taught masters degrees in the UK achieve between 75 and 90 credits and some research based masters, such as the MPhil, between 120 and 150." Finally, it applauded "the seminar's agreement to the continued existence of integrated one-tier programmes leading to master degrees" (ibid: §11).

In arguing this way, the HLPF indirectly defended both the English one-year Masters degrees and the extended undergraduate programmes leading directly to MEng degrees and the like, and sought European references to show that these degrees were accommodated by the Bologna process. These statements have to be understood in the context of European documents and debates that had more or less explicitly declared two-year Masters programmes the European norm (see chapter 5 on European developments, and, for example, Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002).

Credits and qualification frameworks. A third reservation concerned the use of credits in the context of ECTS and related to that, the development of qualifications frameworks. The HLPF urged "ministers in Berlin to recognise established systems of credit transfer and accumulation (…) taking into account their own specific mission and priorities" (HLPF, 2003: §14), referring to the credit systems that Scotland and Wales had operated for some years. It stressed the British preference for an "outcomes-standards-based" approach (ibid: §10),

hinting at the results of the Tuning project and the Dublin descriptors of the Joint Quality Initiative (see chapter 5).

Behind these statements was British scepticism towards the purely length- and workload-based approach of ECTS which ran contrary to British approaches in developing and using credit frameworks and potentially discredited its one-year Masters programmes.

These three topics—European quality assurance, degree length, and credits and qualification frameworks—would dominate the English debates on the Bologna process in the months to follow.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EUROPE UNIT. Less than a year after the establishment of the HLPF, Universities UK and HEFCE agreed to financially support the establishment of a small office that would "inform HEIs and stakeholders" of relevant European developments, "coordinate UK involvement in European initiatives and policy debates", and "produce collective UK statements in areas of EU policy and lobby them appropriately" (Europe Unit, 2004d). Towards these ends, the 'UK HE Europe Unit' was launched in January 2004. It was funded by Universities UK and the three funding councils for England, Scotland, and Wales, with additional project funding from SCOP and the QAA.

Intended to represent the sector as a whole, the UK HE Europe Unit was supported by a wide range of stakeholders, including the British Council and the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council. *De facto*, it soon became key for coordinating the response of the UK HE sector to the Bologna process, with input from the HLPF and the ECG. It also contributed to "persuading the Department to take European issues seriously" (Interview Floud, 2004). Vis-à-vis the UK HE sector, the role of the Europe Unit was to promote the Bologna process by informing the sector of European developments and clarifying misunderstandings, but also by pointing out where it thought that UK interests were at stake. While the Europe Unit had

> some quite significant concerns with a couple of action lines [it was] happy with the others, for example in terms of promoting mobility, the European dimension, the two-cycle system, comparability of degrees, and involvement of staff and students (Interview Bourke, 2004).

THE EUROPE UNIT'S CONTRIBUTION AND THE UK RESPONSE TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS. A month after its establishment, the Europe Unit already began to publish its 'Europe notes', condensed leaflets meant to inform the British HE sector of European developments. The notes became a representative reflection of ongoing debates in the sector.

A note informing the sector of the results of the Berlin Ministerial Summit (Europe Unit, 2004a) took up the tone set in HLPF's statement for the meeting and stressed that "the UK must remain vigilant on a number of key issues" (ibid: 2). In a similar vein, the UK approach was later described as "supporting, but

carefully monitoring the development of the intergovernmental Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area" which was nevertheless portrayed

> as a valuable contribution to enhancing the employability and mobility of UK citizens and increasing the competitiveness of European higher education institutions (Europe Unit, 2004e).

Among the issues that—according to the Europe Unit—were to be watched carefully, were "attempts to introduce a pan-European *system of external evaluation*"[emphasis added], which, as the note reported, "were resisted in the communiqué" (Europe Unit, 2004a:2).

With respect to the emerging European HE qualifications framework, it was made clear that "an intrusive, detailed system to which signatory countries would need to adapt their existing systems is to be avoided" (ibid: 3). Of particular concern were the "moves to develop a European credit system based on notional learning effort rather than outcomes achieved" (ibid: 3). The UK HE Europe Unit argued that in the increasingly lifelong learning context, what a student was able to do (as shown in learning outcomes) was more important than the amount of time spent studying, which is an input indicator. The Europe Unit also indicated that "a system focused on workload would damage the reputation of UK HE since the UK does not compare favourably to other European countries in this way", explaining that "current credit systems indicate that the average academic year in continental countries is 1,600 hours which casts the UK norm of 1,200 in a bad light" (ibid: 3).[318] As England did not have a common credit system yet, it might be "left behind in the pan-European move towards credit systems" (ibid: 3). Finally, it noted that "the *influence of the European Commission* in the Bologna process has been steadily increasing [emphasis added]" (ibid: 4), and called upon the UK HE sector to "enhance links with key players in EU institutions in order to influence EU involvement in the Bologna process" (ibid: 4). The overall tone was defensive, and mirrored the fear of being unable to influence the course of developments.

In subsequent notes, the Europe Unit encouraged HEIs to implement the Diploma Supplement (Europe Unit, 2004b, 2004c). The debate about the introduction of the Diploma Supplement played a special role in the English response to the Bologna process, as it was one of few the elements of the process' commitments that required some tangible change in the English HE system, and that the sector felt happy with. One reason was that it fit with ongoing efforts in HEIs to establish a student "Progress File" following the Dearing Report (see sections 9.2.6 and 9.3.3). While the main thrust of the Progress Files was different from the Diploma Supplement, namely to help students monitor and reflect upon

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[318] The UK HE Europe Unit also indicated that the proposed 1,200 hours was widely agreed as not fully reflecting the notional workload of a typical UK student (Interview Bourke, 2004).

their progress rather than to inform employers and HEIs, its 'transcript' technically required "just a few additional fields in the software" (Interview Floud, 2004) to create the Diploma Supplement. Against this background, it was argued that "the implementation of the Diploma Supplement may be one of the more manageable objectives [of the Bologna process] and might be seen to present the UK HE sector with fewer difficulties".

Based on these considerations, the Europe Unit recommended HEIs to "demonstrate [their] willingness to implement the objective, preparing the ground for the UK to engage more critically with other more difficult issues in the Process". Compliance with the Diploma Supplement was thus regarded partly as a means to improve the negotiation position for more disputed themes such as "quality assurance, credit systems and qualifications frameworks" (Europe Unit, 2004b:3).

In May 2004, in time for the European elections, the Europe Unit summarised the sector's position on European HE policy in a note titled "European Elections 2004: Charter for UK HE Sector". It stressed that the emerging European qualifications framework should be "overarching", that a "single, intrusive or bureaucratic [quality assurance] agency at EU level" was to be prevented, and that "moves towards ECTS" should "include a focus on learning outcomes, currently usually alongside notional student workload, in order to recognise fully different teaching styles" (Europe Unit, 2004e).[319]

With awareness for the Bologna process slowly rising among HEIs, misunderstandings made the rounds. A lead article titled "Spaghetti Bolognese" by QAA Head Peter Williams in the QAA's bulletin from June 2004, responded to the situation by paraphrasing the fears of British academics:

> What is the Bologna process? Does it affect us? Are we going to have to change the way we do things? Are we being pulled into a European HE system, with unknown consequences and unpredictable demands and burdens? Suddenly everyone is asking about the Bologna Process. Rumours are flying round campuses that UK universities and colleges are going to have to run longer undergraduate courses or close down successful and long-standing one-year Master's degrees. Further, it is whispered that everyone is going to have to adopt the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and accept any applicant who comes with ECTS credits. Nothing like this has been seen since the PhD arrived from Germany in the early 20th century (P. Williams, 2004).

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[319] The elections had a Euro-sceptical turnout; in fact the UK Independence Party made the largest gains at the expense of both the Labour and the Tories, who together came out carrying less than 50% of the vote.

Williams went on to calm these fears by clarifying that the Bologna process was "simply a voluntary agreement", was different from the EU, did not require "a 3+2+3 structure", and that "UK universities remain autonomous degree-awarding bodies". He also explained that there were "plenty of opportunities for people to create a Bologna Process bandwagon for their own needs", and presented the Diploma Supplement as the "only commitment with direct implications for UK HEIs" (P. Williams, 2004: 1). Similar confusion is reflected in Guardian article of July 2004 which spread the rumour that "German educational academics say foundation degrees run contrary to the Bologna process" and even was "anti-European" (Becker, 2004), although this was not an issue in the German HE community at the time.

At the same time, British actors took an active part in the Bologna process at the European level. A reflection of this was the 'Bologna Learning Outcomes Seminar' in Edinburgh in July 2004, the first official Bologna seminar in the UK. QAA representatives were closely involved in the development of a European HE qualifications framework. Universities UK actively participated in the European Universities Association (EUA) and significantly influenced some of the EUA positions that subsequently found their way into the Berlin communiqué (2003), such as that the prime responsibility of HEIs for quality assurance rested with HEIs. Similarly, student representatives from the NUS played a leading role within the umbrella organisation of national unions of students in Europe (ESIB). Central themes of the Bologna process such as a two-cycle structure, qualifications frameworks, and credit systems, had a history in the UK; consequently British actors could bring to bear their experience (Interview Weavers, 2004).

On 14 July 2004, the House of Lords held its first debate on the Bologna process. On this occasion, Universities UK published a briefing document explaining the background of the developments to the general public (UUK, 2004c). While the document started by explaining that Universities UK was supportive of the broad principles of the Bologna Process in terms of creating the European HE area and increasing mobility, it ended with a somewhat excited rhetoric, calling

> upon the Government to engage in the Bologna process at the highest level to *defend* the interests of UK higher education institutions, for example, to *protect* the UK's one-year Masters programmes which have been so successful on the market (ibid: §27) [emphasis added].

The competitiveness of national HEIs was another major theme in the English debate on the Bologna process (Crewe, 2004). Universities UK had already expressed the fear of a potential image loss for UK HEIs associated with a

European label in 2003 (UUK, 2003b).[320] The Bologna process was perceived by many to harm the UK either way: if the quality of other European HE systems remained where it was, the UK would not want to be associated with them but if their quality improved significantly, the UK would "have a lot more competitors at the top", and "there are concerns about that" (Interview Weavers, 2004). Other voices stressed the potential gains from European cooperation with respect to competitiveness, similar to Blackstone's original motivation (see section 9.3.2). The comparatively low outward mobility of British students was one of the major arguments in favour of this position (Interview Blackstone, 2004; Interview Copland, 2004; Interview Floud, 2004; Interview Reilly, 2004; Interview Weavers, 2004) (see also Hodges, 2002).

Another continued debate centred around the length of English Masters degrees. From the perspective of the British HE sector, the main issue here was that "as the Bologna Process never formally agreed to the two-year duration for the second cycle, we do not feel compelled to rule out the one year" (Interview Bourke, 2004). In July 2004, the UK HE Europe Unit published a note on "Masters degrees and the Bologna process" to "outline the misunderstandings surrounding the issue and set out the facts in an effort to dispel confusion" (Europe Unit, 2004f:1). In the meantime, the lines of conflict had become more explicit than when the HLPF (2003) had published its position. According to the note,

> as Bologna signatory countries make changes to their higher education systems towards the 3+2 model, the one-year Masters is repeatedly subject to attack by some influential individuals and in some Bologna fora (Europe Unit, 2004f: 2).

Related to that, there was concern that

> the one-year Masters programme (and/or by association our honours bachelors programmes) may be considered 'lightweight', if not in skills, at least in curricula knowledge or with respect to the weight of the dissertation. Such allegations, if not refuted, could clearly have damaging consequences for the international reputation of UK higher education (ibid: 3).

Clearly, there were no driving forces in the English system to change the length of the existing one-year Masters degrees, which were popular with UK and

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[320] "The UK has a world-wide reputation for high quality higher education courses and its qualifications command a high value internationally. There could be significant difficulties or resistance to UK higher education being 'badged' as 'European' on quality and qualifications until there is a shared European understanding of the qualification model; for example which is emerging from the Bologna process" (UUK, 2003a:15).

international students as well as with employers. As a student representative explains:

> There is such an embedded culture of doing one-year Masters here that it is accepted by students as well. Plus the balances of it: at the moment you do one year, pay for one year, and get a Masters. And I think it is unlikely that students are going to lobby to pay twice as much to get what domestically will be seen as the same qualification. And although you have more flexible labour markets in Europe now, most people will still go and work in the UK, and therefore not pay twice as much for the same qualification (Interview Weavers, 2004).

A similar argument applied to *international* students, and rendered one-year Masters degrees highly attractive on the international market. International competitiveness in overseas markets was therefore another important argument for maintaining the one-year Masters degrees:

> What we don't agree with is incorrect claims that the two-year Masters is obligatory under Bologna. Furthermore, in the context of Bologna's focus on the international dimension of the European HE area, combined with the Lisbon Strategy's call for Europe to become the most competitive knowledge economy in the world, it would be madness to terminate the one-year Masters which is a highly attractive and popular qualification on the international HE market (Interview Bourke, 2004).

Against this background, the English defended their one-year Masters degrees on two grounds. First, they argued that it was competencies and demand that mattered, not length or the amount of credits. Second, they argued that the English one-year Masters programmes were worth more credits than generally assumed: while ECTS would normally attribute 60 credits to any one-year programme, irrespective of actual workload and the competencies acquired by students, the English argument was that most of their one-year Masters programmes lasted 12 months—as opposed to the normal academic year of 9 months—and were therefore worth at least 75-90 ECTS credits. Some programmes also lasted more than a year with the final thesis taking up to autumn, and were therefore worth 90 plus ECTS credits. In this context, the Europe note made reference again to the Helsinki Conference on Masters (Europe Unit, 2004f:4).

   Also in July 2004, the Europe Unit published a note on "European engineering initiatives". In light of the differences between approaches to Engineering education in the UK and the rest of Europe, notably with respect to the relationship of academia and practice in obtaining the licence to practice, the document sought to promote dialogue (Europe Unit & HLPF, 2004). In September 2004, the Europe Unit launched its official website.

Reflecting on the overall English response to the Bologna process, a sceptical and defensive attitude seems to be dominant. It is however important to understand these perceptions against the background of institutional setting of the English HE system, and its particular position within Europe. This perspective is well summarised by the following quote from an English HE expert:

> They may be wrong but the English think they have what is widely regarded as by and large quite a successful higher education system, and one which has proved popular to students from other European countries and around the world. They have a point if they say 'if it isn't broken why fix it?' Each Bologna proposal would need to demonstrate that it actually improves the English system if it is to be widely acceptable. I have often been frustrated by English conservatism and by their reluctance to approach Europe. In this, I must say, I think they have a point. The danger, of course, is that they close their minds completely. I don't think that is happening (Interview Bekhradhnia, 2004)

That this is not happening is also exemplified in the active involvement of English HE actors in the respective European and Bologna bodies and working groups. Considering the debates portrayed in this section, it is fair to say that the activities of the HLPF, the ECG, and the Europe Unit contributed to a significant rise in awareness of the Bologna process in a relatively short period of time. The upcoming EU presidency of the UK in the second half of 2005, and the changed approach of the Department also played a role. Overall however, little policy change took place in the context of the Bologna process until 2004, as the next section will recapitulate.

9.4   Policy change until autumn 2004

As one English HE expert put it, "there has been a non-stop reform of British HE over the past 15 years", including the years from 1998 to 2004 (Interview Bekhradhnia, 2004). However, these reforms largely took place independent of the Bologna process. Minor exceptions are the introduction of the Diploma Supplement and some additional momentum for the spread of credits.[321] The reform in England was mostly not related to a change in degree structures. With the exception of the introduction of the Foundation degree and a national qualifications framework, nothing changed in this dimension and therefore could not trigger further changes. Most of the reforms that took place in the period went back to the 1997 Dearing Report, and most of it was concentrated in three

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[321]   The creation of a national qualifications framework resonated with similar European efforts, but was an independent initiative, although the European efforts later contributed to increasing its relevance in the English debate (see section 9.4.3).

dimensions, namely the funding of HE (notably student fees), curricular governance, and access. I will nevertheless report the changes in all seven dimensions of this study (see chapter 4 on methodology). Given the breadth of reforms in the English HE system over this period, this will also include a few policy initiatives not dealt with in the previous section on policy development.

9.4.1 Institutional types

In the field of institutional types, the main changes occurred with respect to the rights to award degrees and to carry the university title. The government changed the rules, making it easier for non-university institutions to become universities (DfES, 2004a). There were two key changes: first, to qualify for university title, it was now sufficient for an institution to have the right to award taught degrees; research-degree awarding powers were no longer a prerequisite. In practice this meant that an institution did not need to undertake significant research to qualify as a university, though its staff did need to engage in "active scholarship", the requirements for which were more explicitly formulated. Second, specialist institutions could now become universities. It was no longer required for them to cover a certain range of subjects, as long as they surpassed a threshold of a minimum number of 4,000 students, 3,000 of whom needed to be enrolled in degree-level courses.[322] These changes allowed both the present non-university colleges of HE and private or commercial providers to apply for university status.[323] Allowing a couple of "borderline" institutions to become universities had wider implications, as it made it more explicit that the transition between the university and the HE college sectors was in reality not clear cut, but rather smooth. In this way it contributed to bringing both sectors closer to each other.

Another, albeit less tangible trend was the continued push of the Government for an increasing differentiation of the HE sector into research and teaching institutions through different funding methods (DfES, 2003b); an intention to which Universities UK objected, stating that "research concentration has gone far enough" (UUK, 2003b).

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[322] The requirement that the 4,000 FTE students should be spread across at least five broad subject categories was removed by the government (Interview Ambrose, 2004).

[323] The first HEI to take advantage of the opportunity for specialist HEIs to become universities was the London Institute (now University of the Arts, London), but it had already achieved both taught and research degree-awarding powers under the previous criteria. The University Colleges with taught degree awarding powers which have subsequently become universities under the new criteria until spring 2006 are Bath Spa University; University of Chichester; Canterbury Christ Church University; University of Chester; University of Worcester; Liverpool Hope University; University of Winchester; and Southampton Solent University (the current names) (Interview Ambrose, 2004).

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9.4.2 Degree structure

There were two noteworthy developments of degree structures in England between 1998 and 2004; the introduction of the Foundation degree and the creation of a national framework for HE qualifications (FHEQ) in 2001. Overall, both were quite minor changes; the Foundation degree because is was a niche programme in addition to the mainstream honours route and ultimately not that different from existing qualifications at the same level; the FHEQ because the extent to which it actually touched upon reality within HEIs was limited. With respect to the main issue in the context of Bologna; the length and format of the Masters degree, there was quite some debate, but it centred on how to defend the status quo rather than how to change it.

What was new about the Foundation degrees was the fresh impetus for employer cooperation compared to the existing two-year Higher National Diploma (HND) courses, and a broad-scale government campaign to make them popular. Part of that was calling these 'sub-degree level' qualifications 'degrees'—although a transition course in the summer and another year of studies were needed to reach the Honours level. By autumn 2004, Foundation degrees were still disputed, with many traditional research-oriented universities wary of them. Student numbers remained far below the envisaged target of around 100,000 graduates per year (Thomson, 2005). There were 800 Foundation degree programmes at over 100 HE and FE institutions catering for 24,000 students (half of them part-time), "with applications up by 50% for 2004/05" (DfES, 2004b: 2). In terms of professional fields, the degrees were particularly popular in the public sector—such as with teaching assistants in schools. In terms of age groups, many students were above the age of 30—so that the new qualification did not contribute as much as hoped to bringing the participation rate among 18-30 year-olds up to 50%.

The "framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland" (QAA, 2001a) was a change in so far as it constituted a first attempt of the Government, through the QAA, to bring national consistency into the diverse degrees and degree titles that HEIs were offering based on tradition, and rooted in their inherited independence in awarding degrees. The framework defined generic levels of competence at five levels: Certificate, Intermediate, Honours, Masters, and Doctorate. A clarifying element was the definition of the Intermediate level, which, in addition to the traditional HND and the new Foundation degree also included "ordinary (non-Honours) degrees". The Masters level included Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas as well as the extended four-year undergraduate programmes in science and engineering leading directly to degrees such as MEng or MChem. HEIs had to demonstrate their awareness of the framework in the QAA's institutional audits; however, they were not binding.

While the introduction of the Foundation degree was completely independent of the Bologna process, the agreement at the Berlin conference to include the sub-degree level in the emerging European HE qualifications framework (EQF) helped bring this reform into the European realm, albeit ex-post (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). The English efforts to create an FHEQ resonated with European efforts to create a European HE qualifications framework, and the QAA was particularly active in the respective working groups at the European level. Conversely, the European developments created some momentum in England to increase efforts to include credits in the FHEQ and formulate their outcomes- and competency-based approach more sharply (Burgess Report, 2004; HLPF, 2003).

9.4.3   Curricular governance

The governance of curricula underwent significant changes from 1998 to 2004, mainly through the ongoing development of the QAA's approach. As of 2001, subject reviews—the prior teaching quality assessments—were subsequently phased out and replaced by a new method of institutional audit (QAA, 2002), which would be the main form of QAA interaction with institutions from the academic year 2004/05 onwards. In the audit, the QAA checked whether institutions adhered to a 'code of practice' setting out the main elements of internal quality assurance mechanisms they were expected to have in place. External evaluation at the subject-level would only be carried out if the institutional audit indicated the need for a thorough check. In the transition period until autumn 2004, so-called 'developmental engagements' would help institutions put their own internal quality assurance system at subject level in place. The audit was embedded in a wider set of tools for curricular governance, referred to as the 'academic infrastructure'. It included the FHEQ (see above), subject benchmark statements, and programme specifications. Subject benchmark statements were the result of an effort of academics, facilitated by the QAA, to agree on "expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas" in terms of competencies and skills (QAA, 2003a: 12). While they were not binding, HEIs had to demonstrate that they had taken them into account when designing their programmes. In the programme descriptions, institutions were expected to give "a concise description of the intended outcomes of learning (…) and the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated" (ibid). Finally, it was envisaged that institutions would have to make information on their programmes available to students and employers, following a systematic format defined by the QAA and HEFCE, leading to the later Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web-site.[324]

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[324]   The TQI website first went live in September 2004 but the information was incomplete; a complete version was launched in 2005.

While the abolition of subject reviews constituted a marked increase of curricular autonomy of HEIs, the new overall framework including institutional audits and the 'academic infrastructure' provided a clearly defined limiting framework for that freedom.

None of the actors in English HE policy considered moving to a system of programme accreditation; to the contrary, they agreed that

> the UK's experience with course-based review is that it is unnecessarily bureaucratic and costly. Where institutions have strong internal quality procedures, as in the UK, institutional based review/audit has proved to be effective and cost-efficient (HLPF, 2003).

Furthermore, they were extremely wary of the European Commission's initiative in this field, making clear that "the UK would resist attempts to introduce a European system of external course evaluation, a single pan-European quality system or form of course-based system" (ibid). While change in this dimension was unrelated to the Bologna process, the QAA was strongly involved in the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).[325]

9.4.4 Curricula

Only modest changes occurred in HE curricula between 1998 and 2004; the Bologna process contributed in a small measure to improving the acceptance of ECTS among English HEIs, and the sector achieved consensus to introduce the Diploma Supplement.

In autumn 2004, the use of ECTS was still largely confined to the context of the Socrates-Erasmus programme, and no consensus had been achieved in the sector in favour of its adoption. While a range of regional credit networks had managed to agree on common guidelines for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (EWNI, 2001), and credit systems were widely used among English institutions (Johnson, 2004), the QAA had not managed to forge agreement on a national credit system. The FHEQ was based not on credit but on verbally defined levels of competence. Particularly among the universities of the Russell Group (see section 9.2.1), many still rejected the use of credits and modularisation, which they saw as supporting a "cafeteria-style" model and a mechanistic approach to the approval of student achievements (Bekhradnia, 2004). Universities UK had not formulated an official position in favour of ECTS or any other credit system. At the same time however, the Department had begun to informally promote the use of credits and HEFCE was considering internally how credits could become a basis for teaching

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[325] There will also be some mention of the European Standards and Guidelines in the new audit methodology for 2006-11, which is being prepared for publication and consultation.

allocations. In November 2004, an expert report commissioned by Universities UK and SCOP recommended to agree on a national credit system and its articulation with ECTS (Burgess Report, 2004). As a response, the Department officially charged HEFCE to consider ways of promoting this (Clarke, 2004). In the European context, English actors in HE policy were "keen to ensure that moves towards ECTS include a focus on learning outcomes, currently usually alongside notional student workload, in order to recognise fully different teaching styles" (Europe Unit, 2004e). This was related to the concern that one-year Masters degrees, if only judged on the basis of time spent, could have a difficult standing in the European context (Europe Unit, 2004e, 2004f).

The Diploma Supplement appears to be the main element of the Bologna process that the English HE sector agreed to implement; its use was encouraged and supported by Universities UK and the UK HE Europe Unit (Europe Unit, 2004b). It tied in well with a similar initiative that had been recommended by the Dearing report: the use of student 'progress files' which were meant to help students document and reflect upon their learning (QAA, 2003a: 12). The introduction of the Diploma Supplement had considerable weight in the national debate as it was seen as a way for actors in HE to "demonstrate willingness to implement the objective, preparing the ground for the UK to engage more critically with other more difficult issues in the Process" (Europe Unit, 2004b).

While these changes were overall quite modest, the major reforms that were debated regarding the broadening of secondary education (see "access") could be expected to force universities to more fundamentally rethink their curricula in the near future.

9.4.5 Access

Access was one of the most debated dimensions between 1998 and 2004, and also an area of tangible policy change. Following the Dearing report, increasing and widening participation—notably the difficulty to get more working class children into university—was high on the Government's agenda; the Foundation degree was a concrete measure to achieve that goal (Hill, 2005). Substantial funds were made available through HEFCE to support this agenda through measures to reward and support recruitment of students from socially underrepresented groups (HEFCE, 2004). Furthermore, the cap on available places for Honours degrees was lifted (DfEE, 1998a).

With respect to admissions to HE, an 'Office for Fair Access' (OFFA) was set up as a compensatory measure for the introduction of variable student fees (see next section). HEIs were legally required to outline their plans for assuring that students from poorer families were not deterred by the new fees regime. The sector consultations of the Schwartz (2004) review contributed to raising awareness among HEIs for fair and transparent admissions procedures.

Over the entire period, a fundamental reform of secondary schooling was debated and initial steps were implemented. The main trust was the broadening of secondary education and the creation of an integrated school-leaving 'diploma' encompassing different academically and vocationally-oriented qualifications at that level. Under the 'Curriculum 2000+' reform, the traditional A-levels were complemented by AS- and A2-levels, allowing students to study a wider range of subjects in less depth. The working group on 14-19 reform worked out concrete proposals for a broader diploma, referred to as 'baccalaureate-type' (Tomlinson, 2004). The consultations revealed a widespread consensus for such reforms, which would constitute a clear departure from the English tradition of highly specialised secondary education as a preparation for university.

9.4.6   Transition to employment

With the exception of the introduction of the Foundation degree, the relationship between HE and the employment system did not change markedly between 1998 and 2004. However, employability and skills of graduates inside and outside HE were a key priority not only of the Department, but of the government as a whole. A range of official documents increased the pressure on institutions to pay attention to the employability of their graduates, such as the Green Paper on Lifelong learning (DfEE, 1998b, 1999a) and the Lambert Report (2003) which focused on university-industry links. These recommendations were supported by tangible policies with monetary backing. All this contributed to increasing the attention HEIs were paying to the employability of their graduates. HEFCE for example, established a Department-funded project on enhancing employability. It also started to use quality indicators on the employment of graduates to help HEIs monitor that aspect of their performance. Issues of employability began to informally creep into the QAA agenda when undertaking audits and reviews. Around 2002, the Department also set up the 'Enhancing student employability co-ordination team' (ESECT), responsible for pulling together all the research and activity on employability in the sector and disseminating good practice. It worked closely with the 'Generic Center' of the universities' 'Learning and Teaching Subject Networks'—now part of the HE Academy—that were also supported by HEFCE and among others, looked into employability in the curriculum (Interview Harvey, 2004).

   With regard to the Bologna process and European integration in general, the increasing awareness of the need for European cooperation in engineering education was of some relevance; given the unique British approach to curricula, quality assurance, and licence for professional practice in that area (Europe Unit & HLPF, 2004).

9.4.7 Funding

Funding for HE, including student fees, was one of the main issues in English HE from 1998 to 2004. The main changes were a new tuition fees regime and a substantial increase of Government spending on HE. Except for additional government funds channelled directly into Foundation degrees to support the widening participation agenda, these changes were however unrelated to adaptations of degree structures, and fully unrelated to the Bologna process.

The standardised upfront fee of £1,000 per academic year for ordinary undergraduate students that had been introduced as of 1998/99 (see section 9.2.7) was again abolished in summer 2004, effective from academic year 2006/07 onwards. It was replaced by a 'graduate contribution scheme' that allowed HEIs to raise differential undergraduate fees of up to £3000 per year, though students did not have to pay them upfront. A publicly subsidised income-contingent loan system was set up for this purpose. Furthermore, universities were required to offer bursaries and incentives to ensure that students from poorer backgrounds were not deterred by the higher fees. Finally, a modest support grant for students from low-income families was reintroduced, effective from the academic year 2004/05 onwards. Empirically, nearly all universities opted for charging the maximum fee.

Regarding funding for institutions, the major change was a substantial increase of government spending on research and teaching. Much of the increase of the teaching allocation was related to the increasing and widening participation agenda; but Universities UK also succeeded in convincing the Government that a higher level of funding per student was needed. The HEFCE allocation for the HE sector was increased from £3.876 bio in 1998/99 to £5.993 bio in 2004/05; funding per student increased from £4,198 in 1998/99 to £6213 in 2004/05 (Interview Scott, 2004).[326]

The method used by HEFCE to allocate its teaching funds was adjusted several times between 1998 and 2004, but these changes were rather minor; either of a technical nature or related to the widening participation agenda. To support the latter, the government set "broad policy guidelines" for distributing extra funds (HEFCE, 2004: 3), notably to channel them into Foundation degrees. Following a minor review of the funding method in 2003/2004, HEFCE earmarked specific funding for student support and retention and for "allocations to recognise the additional costs of recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged and non-traditional backgrounds, and students with disabilities" (ibid: 8, 14).

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[326] Looking only at teaching-related funding, the numbers were £2.694 bio (1998/99) and £ 3.826 bio (2004/05) respectively, and funding per student £2,918 (1998/99) and £3,966 (2004/05).

Finally, discussions were under way within the Department and HEFCE to base the per-student allocation in the funding formula on credits instead of on the basis of the fraction of the year the student completes as was currently the case. While technically, this would not make much of a difference, it would support the use of credits by institutions.

10 Comparative analysis

In the individual case studies, the first research question of this study was addressed,

RQ 1. "How are the national degree structures adapted in the context of the Bologna process and what changes does this imply for other relevant dimensions of the respective higher education (HE) systems?"

This was done by reconstructing the policy formulation process and mapping policy change along seven institutional dimensions of HE systems i.e., institutional types, degree structure, curricular governance, curricula, access, transition to employment and funding. Building on this work, I now turn to the second and third research questions,

RQ2. "What explains the nature and degree of change in the respective HE systems and the similarities and differences between them?"; and

RQ3. "Do the adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process contribute to the convergence of the respective HE systems?"

Towards this end, policy change is compared across the four HE systems in relation to adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process. I seek to explain its nature and degree (RQ2) with the method of causal reconstruction and a comparative approach, using the theoretical framework developed for this study. To recapitulate, beginning with North's model of institutional change, I have used conceptual elements from ACI to specifiy the study of actor interaction, and deduced key dimensions of HE systems in order to break down the study of the initial institutional setting and policy change to the research topic. Figure 3.9 summarises the full theoretical framework developed in this chapter.

Similar to the case studies, the comparative analysis is performed along the seven institutional dimensions of HE systems. For each dimension the analysis is divided into two parts: first, I compare the institutional setting in 1998 and the policy change until 2004 between the four HE systems, and assess the degree of convergence among them (RQ 3). In judging the nature and degree of policy change in relation to adaptations of national degree structures, I also take into account the implementation policy on the reformed degree structures (as discussed in sections 2.2.1 and 4.4.1.3). I deal with this point separately in the dimension of 'degree structure' and come back to it in the overall analysis in section 10.3.1.1. To account for the unique features of the English case, I consider both changes in English HE policy that took place inside and outside the context of the Bologna process.

Second, the differences in the nature and degree of change are explained with the help of a limited number of analytical lenses: actor constellations—made up of preferences, perceptions, and capabilities—and actor interaction, as well as the formal and informal features of the inherited institutional setting. As actor capabilities are largely the same across dimensions, they are discussed at the beginning of the chapter before entering the dimensional analysis, and taken up again where needed in the explanatory analysis.

In the concluding section (10.3), findings from the comparative analysis regarding the degree of policy change and convergence are summarised before reflecting on cross-dimensional patterns in the explanatory factors (see chapter 3 for the theoretical framework and chapter 4 for issues of methodology and operationalisation).

10.1 Actors and their capabilities

In this chapter national actors and their capabilities are compared between the four HE systems, focusing on ministries responsible for HE and the representative bodies of different types of HEIs, academic staff, students, and employers. Advisory bodies, quality assurance organisations, international offices, and other relevant actors are also considered. Table 10.1 lists them per country, before I turn to a discussion of their capabilities.

Table 10.1: National actors in HE policy in international comparison

Actor category	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Ministry in charge of HE[327]	BMBF at national level (responsible department within: Department of HE & FE), 16 *Länder* ministries,** coordinated in KMK	MOCenW (responsible department within: HE directorate)	MEN (responsible department within: DES)	DfES (responsible department within: directorate of HE (& FE))

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[327] For simplicity of reading and as it performs the functions of a ministry, the English Department of Education and Employment (DfEE), later Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is equally referred to as 'ministry'.

Actor category	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Representative organisation of HEIs	HRK	VSNU, HBO-*raad*	CPU, CDEFI, CGE, ADIUT	Universities UK, SCOP
Representative organisation of academic staff	DHV, hlb	VAWO	SNESUP	AUT*, NATFE*
Representative organisation of students	fzs	LSVb, ISO	UNEF, La Fage, PDE*	NUS
Representative organisation of employers	BDA, Stifterverband	VNO-NCW	MEDEF	CBI*
Advisory body	Wissen-schaftsrat	Education Council, ad hoc commissions*	-	Ad hoc commissions*
Quality assurance organisation	Evaluation agencies* in some *Länder* or as initiative of HEIs, since early 1999 national *Akkreditierungsrat*, six accreditation agencies*	Education Inspectorate, since 2002 NVAO	MEN (within: DES, MSTP) CTI, Helfer Commission*, CNE*	QAA
International cooperation agency	DAAD	NUFFIC	Edufrance*	British Council*
Disciplinary and profes-sional association	Numerous*	Numerous*	Numerous*	Numerous*
Other	CHE*	CHEPS*	CNESER	HEFCE

Note: * *Actors marked with an asterisk are mentioned for the sake of completeness and comparison, but have played a less important role in the process and received only cursory attention. They have not been included in the list of actor interviews, but expert interviews have been conducted with some of them. For the role of CHE and CHEPS, see footnote 52 in methodological chapter. **Two German Länder ministries responsible for HE have been chosen for actor interviews: Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia.*

In all HE systems except for England, the **ministries responsible for HE** (henceforth often simply referred to as "the ministries") were the actors with the single highest capability to influence HE policy in their countries. Though sometimes difficult to disentangle, this was both in terms of institutional conditions and of the use of those conditions by personalities such as ministers, department heads etc. during the period in question; even when this capability was based on different formal and informal rules regarding the relationship of the ministry and HEIs.

In terms of Scharpf (1997), these capabilities can be conceptualised as the ability to provide a national forum for "negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy" i.e., to bundle the national discussion with and among stakeholders while maintaining leadership over the outcomes. What has been said about multi-level and multi-actor governance in the theoretical chapter has thus so far not led to a deconstruction of state influence over HE.

In the Netherlands and France, the national ministries provided fora for "negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy" (Scharpf, 1997, see chapter 3.2.5). Compared to the Dutch ministry responsible for HE, the leadership role of the French ministry was more strongly backed up by its formal powers, but this ministry had only limited control over the *grandes écoles* sector. Owed to the traditionally high degree of autonomy of English HEIs, the institutional base for the capability of the ministry to steer policy formulation was lower than in France and the Netherlands to begin with. In the particular case of the Bologna process, two factors decreased the capability further; first, that degrees were traditionally at the core of HEIs' institutional autonomy; and second, that the ministry hardly assumed an active stance on this particular issue. Both factors contributed to a situation in which the forum for negotiation was ultimately organised by the HE sector itself in the form of a 'High Level Policy Forum', in the absence of a "shadow of hierarchy". The German federal ministry structurally had the lowest capabilities compared to its counterparts. Due to the sharing of power in the federal system, it was unable to provide an effective national forum for negotiation. This function was instead dispersed to 16 *Länder* ministries and only partly substituted by their Standing Conference (KMK).

National ministries also differed in the policy instruments they had at hand and in their relationship with parliament. The German federal ministry could draft amendments of the Federal HE framework act, but was constrained by the need to first reach a consensus with the 16 *Länder* to affect national change. The influence of the national parliament was limited. Usually it was consulted only after a consensus had been reached with and among the *Länder*. This was quite different in the Netherlands, where the national parliament was consulted extensively before amendments to the national HE act were affected. In France, the national HE act was politically so difficult to change that instead many reforms were formalised at the level of decrees (*décrets* and *arrêtés*), and the national parliament was therefore not involved in these changes. While no

unified legal framework for HE existed in England, HE reforms still could be formalised in individual laws. But other policy instruments such as funding rules, were used to an equal extent.

The way **HEIs** were represented at the national level crucially determined the way their interests entered the policy process. The contrast was particularly pronounced between Germany, which had only one body representing the two major types of HEIs, universities, and *Fachhochschulen*; and the Netherlands, where universities and *hogescholen* were represented in separate organisations at the national level. While conflicts between the two types of HEIs were clearly articulated in the Netherlands, they were not in Germany. In France, universities, *grandes écoles*, engineering schools, and IUTs were represented in different, partly overlapping bodies with different statutes; the overall picture was quite fuzzy. Among them, the university rectors' conference (CPU) had an elevated status as a formal partner of the ministry and was consulted on all issues. In England, 'old' and 'new' universities spoke with one voice and for the UK as a whole, whereas English HE colleges were represented in a separate organisation.

In all countries—except for England, where Universities UK itself assumed a leading role—the universities vice-chancellors' conferences emerged as the single most important counterpart to the ministries in the policy formulation process. In France, this relationship went furthest and took the form of a veritable alliance between the ministry and the CPU. In the Netherlands, the ministry dealt with both the representative organisations of universities and *hogescholen*, but there the university rectors' conference VSNU ultimately had more weight. In Germany, relationships were complicated by the dispersion of power between state actors and the corporatist nature of the system but the German rectors' conference HRK was the most important counterpart of both the federal ministry and the KMK, and the constellation was repeated at regional level between *Länder* ministries and *Länder* rectors' conferences.

The capability of other types of actors to influence the policy formulation process differed quite significantly between countries.

The role played by **academic staff unions** in France is unique, both in terms of their formal status as a member of the 'higher education parliament' CNESER, and in terms of their frequent and often controversial interventions in HE policy. In the Netherlands and England, staff unions confined their engagement largely to personnel issues and did not voice strong positions on adaptations of degree structures. In Germany, the participation of academic staff unions in general HE policy increased over the last few years, but their impact remained limited nonetheless.

The countries also have quite different traditions regarding the degree to which **student organisations** are involved in national HE policies. They had formal status as government partners and even received public financial support in the Netherlands and France and are regularly consulted—albeit informally—

by the ministry responsible for HE in England. In Germany by contrast, a national student organisation only recently emerged, and government began to take it seriously as a partner even more recently. While students spoke with one voice in England and (recently also in) Germany, national student representation in the Netherlands and France was traditionally split into more 'left-wing' and more 'pragmatic' groups, so that government had to negotiate with two or more student partners. In all countries, the degree to which student organisations actually represented students could be questioned, as participation in elections was generally low. But this did not prevent the Dutch and French student bodies from having an important say in national policies.

Among the four countries, **employer organisations** played the strongest role in the Netherlands, where they have an informal status nearly equal to the representative bodies of HEIs and students, and were usually consulted by the ministry along with them. In France and England, their role was much more confined to cooperation in educational programmes that rely on employer and industry participation (such as the design of *licence professionelle* and *foundation degree*). In Germany, the degree to which employers were involved in national HE policy increased over the last years with the raising awareness that the success of the new degree structure hinged crucially upon employer acceptance.

Germany and the Netherlands each had one major think-tank with a formal **advisory** role in HE policy, the *Wissenschaftsrat* and the Education Council (*Onderwijsraad*), respectively. In England this role was assumed by ad hoc commissions. Although commissions wrote recommendations in France as well, strategic impulses tended to come from the ministry responsible for HE itself. Among the four countries, the Netherlands relied most heavily on stakeholder/expert commissions to set directions, in addition to the influential role of the Education Council.

International cooperation agencies potentially play a role in the policy formulation regarding tiered degree structures too, through their experience in international cooperation in HE and their insight into the barriers to international student mobility. Among them, the German DAAD had the strongest capabilities to influence national policies, as it was involved in channelling public money into pilot projects in HEIs and had a formal advisory role in many aspects of policy formulation. In terms of influence, the DAAD was followed by the Dutch NUFFIC, which interfered more through informal expert advice. *EduFrance* and the British Council played less of a role as they were more concentrated on representation abroad.

Numerous **disciplinary and professional associations** voiced positions on the effects of the adaptation of national degree structures in their area and tried to influence subject-specific adjustments of structure and content. Disciplinary associations were concerned wherever the restructuring affected the traditional sequence of curricular content or the overall timeframe available to complete

studies. Professional associations became particularly active where the adaptation of the degree structure affected the level of transition to employment, potentially creating tensions with existing regulations for the exercise of professional practice. Given the huge number of these associations and the discipline-specific questions involved, they receive only cursory attention in this study.

Finally, a couple of actors are unique to the individual national contexts. The private, but not-for-profit think-tank CHE in Germany and the research institute CHEPS in the Netherlands arguably influenced the policy formulation process in their countries through applied research and recommendations (see footnote 52 in methodological chapter 4). A peculiar construction in France is the existence of the CNESER, a sounding board of the ministry comprised of a wide range of stakeholders that can formally vote on any HE policy even if the ministry can ignore the outcome. A special feature in England is the role of the HEFCE, which plays a role in HE policy making not only through its funding role.

10.2 Analysis by dimension of the institutional setting

In the following sections I compare the nature and degree of policy change in the context of adaptations of national degree structures across countries, in each dimension of the HE setting between early 1998 and autumn 2004. I then assess whether the adaptations of degree structures contributed to the convergence of the four HE systems. Finally, I proceed to the causal reconstruction of the findings based on the comparative analysis of actor constellations and their interaction in the various HE systems, as well as of influence of formal and informal features on the policies that were agreed.

10.2.1 Institutional types

As in the country chapters, the dimension of institutional types is dealt with first, because understanding the role and function of different types of HEIs in the respective systems is a precondition for explaining the degree structure, which differed by institutional types in most of the countries.

10.2.1.1 Mapping policy change and convergence

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN 1998. All four HE systems in this study were marked by some sort of binary divide: between universities and *Fachhochschulen* in Germany; universities and *hogescholen* in the Netherlands; universities and *grandes écoles* in France; and universities and HE colleges in England. However, the dividing lines and the distribution of tasks and status between the respective **types of HEIs** differed. Germany and the Netherlands were most similar in this respect. Both had created an additional type of HEI—*Fachhochschulen* and

hogescholen, respectively—to concentrate on professionally-oriented HE after World War II. In both countries these institutions were less research-intense than universities, their entry conditions were lower, and so was their status. In France, conditions were inverse in that the professionally-oriented *grandes écoles*, some of which had a history dating back to the 18th century, enjoyed higher status than the universities in spite of the fact that most of them did not undertake research. Also, there were two further professionally-oriented institutional types specialised in technical education; the IUTs nested into universities and the engineering schools, which had a hybrid position in that some of them were nested into universities and others belonged to the *grandes écoles.* In England, the functional equivalent of *Fachhochschulen* and *hogescholen,* the former *polytechnics*, had been granted university status in 1992, so that the formal dividing line passed between universities and HE colleges instead, although some differences remained in terms of pay and conditions for staff, public perception and research budgets. The former polytechnics, many of which were created in the 1960s but some with a history dating back much longer, were often referred to as 'new universities'. All universities had the power to award their own degrees. To qualify for university status, a HEI had to demonstrate a certain number of students over five subject areas and substantial research activity, which was also the precondition for offering research degrees. The distinction of research and taught degrees was thus important. The HE college sector encompassed a wide range of small specialist institutions providing taught degrees and concentrating on further and undergraduate education.

Despite the strong parallels between Germany and the Netherlands, a number of important differences remained. In Germany, both types of HEIs were expected to undertake some sort of research; basic research in the case of universities and practice-oriented research in the case of the *Fachhochschulen*. In the Netherlands, *hogescholen* were not publicly funded for any research activity until 2002/03. Accordingly, *Fachhochschul* teachers held doctorate degrees and were called professors in Germany, whereas this was generally not the case in the Netherlands. Also, the gap between entry conditions for both institutional types was bigger in the Netherlands. And while the university sector absorbed about 2/3 of students and the *Fachhochschulen* about 1/3 in Germany, the ratio was the opposite in the Netherlands. In this respect, France was more similar to Germany in that it also 'suffered from' the massification of its university system. Another interesting parallel between Germany and France was the partial inversion of original intent: While both *Fachhochschulen* and IUTs were originally conceived for the less qualified secondary school leavers, due to capacity constraints and selectivity they came to attract some of the best candidates (for Germany this held at least in part). In England, a great degree of institutional diversity was presented *within* the unified university sector, with different universities assuming different profiles.

In all three HE systems, **degree levels and titles** differed between institutional types (see the next section for more detail), but in England this distinction was far less strict and less formalised. While the English HE colleges concentrated on the provision of undergraduate degrees, they could also offer taught Masters degrees. The only degrees reserved for the university sector were research degrees (both Masters and doctorate degrees).

Cooperation and resulting **permeability** between different institutional types was generally low, except for England where it had a long tradition. HE colleges there were often associated with universities and offered degrees under their auspices, so that college graduates could continue their studies in universities. In Germany and the Netherlands, *Fachhochschul* and *hogeschool* degrees gave access to the first and second year of university, respectively, and additional waivers were only granted on a case-by-case basis. In both countries however, *Fachhochschul* and *hogeschool* graduates could in special cases be directly admitted to doctoral studies. In France, the best university and IUT students after the first two years of studies were admitted by the *grandes écoles*, whose Masters-level graduates could in turn do a doctorate at universities. But between these two points, there was little exchange across institutional types.

Table 10.2: Institutional types – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	Types of HEIs (order indicates status hierarchy)	Degree types in relation to types of HEIs	Degree levels and titles in relation to types of HEIs	Cooperation and permeability
Germany	Universities and *Fachhochschulen*	Split: Universities grant theoretical-oriented, *Fachhochschulen* practice-oriented[328] degrees	Differentiated	Low
Netherlands	Universities and *hogescholen*	Split: Universities grant research-oriented, *hogescholen* professionally-oriented degrees	Differentiated	Low

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[328] The literal translation of the original German terminology would be 'application-oriented' degrees.

Country	Types of HEIs (order indicates status hierarchy)	Degree types in relation to types of HEIs	Degree levels and titles in relation to types of HEIs	Cooperation and permeability
France	*Grandes écoles* and universities, (within them) IUTs and engineering schools	Split: *Grandes écoles*, engineering schools and IUTs grant professionally-oriented, universities both research- and professionally-oriented degrees	Differentiated	Low
England	('Old' and 'new') universities and HE colleges	Unified: Distinction of research and taught degrees. Only universities grant research degrees.	Unified (except for research degrees)	High

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. The distinction of **institutional types** as such did not change in any of the countries studied but the defining criteria became less clear-cut, the types became more similar, and the status hierarchy also flattened somewhat. In Germany, the Netherlands, as well as in France, this largely happened through the adaptation of national degree structures (see the next section 10.2.2), which were—in one way or another—used by different actors as an instrument for this purpose. The changes that occurred in England took place independently of the Bologna process.

Regarding **degree types in relation to institutional types**, the most radical policies were formulated in Germany, followed by the Netherlands (this judgement does not take into account implementation policies, see section 10.2.2). In both countries, the strict typology assigning theory- or research-oriented programmes to universities and professionally- or practice-oriented programmes to *Fachhochschulen/hogescholen* was relaxed. This development went further in Germany, where both universities and *Fachhochschulen* could now submit both types of programmes and a considerable number of *Fachhochschul* research Masters programmes were accredited.[329] In the Netherlands, this "de-

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[329] A further change in Germany occurred with respect to the *Berufsakademien*, a type of post-secondary professional education institution that was not formerly seen as part of HE. They can now grant Bachelor degrees, subject to accreditation.

institutionalisation" of degree types—meaning that the type of degree awarded was made independent from the institutional type—so far remained a formal possibility. In France, some movement occurred at the Masters level, but only in one direction in that *grandes écoles* were allowed to grant state degrees (the *diplôme national de master*) if they were willing to undergo state accreditation. In England, change in this dimension was of a different nature, as it changed the defining criteria of one of the institutional types—universities—themselves; the conditions for university status were revised to include teaching-only and specialist institutions. At the same time however, criteria for taught-degree awarding power were tightened to include the proof of active 'scholarship' of academics in the institution in question. These changes allowed a number of HE colleges to become universities.

Regarding **degree levels and titles in relation to institutional types**, again policy change was most pronounced in Germany, followed by the Netherlands, while some changes occurred in the French system too. Both German *Fachhochschulen* and Dutch *hogescholen* could now grant degrees at the Masters level. But while it was common for German universities and *Fachhochschulen* to grant Bachelor as well as Masters degrees, the Dutch Bachelor degree remained much more clearly the general exit point to the labour market from *hogescholen* and the Masters degree from universities. Masters degrees in *hogescholen* are also not publicly funded in the Netherlands. Degree titles for universities and *Fachhochschulen* and for theory- and practice-oriented degrees were also unified in Germany—which was not the case in the Netherlands (see next section). Nevertheless, this development was an equally big step compared to the initial situation in Germany, where *Fachhochschul* degrees were positioned between Bachelor and Masters level prior to the reforms. In the Netherlands, *hogeschool* qualifications were traditionally only regarded as Bachelor level. Change in this respect was more modest in France; universities and *grandes écoles* were formally brought under one roof by the creation of an 'umbrella degree', the *grade de master*. But this 'symbolic' measure did not significantly bring the two institutional types together in reality.[330]

A general trend towards increased **cooperation and permeability** between different institutional types can be observed across the four countries. The trend as such was fairly independent of the Bologna process, but the changes were at least partly framed in this context in all HE systems except for England. In this sub-dimension, the change was more significant in France and the Netherlands than in Germany. In France, the ministry responsible for HE encouraged the

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[330] At the Bachelor level, the ministry responsible for HE aimed at improving cooperation between universities, IUTs, and secondary schools through the new *licence professionelle*. Success in this regard was mixed however in that with the exception of some successful cooperation projects, many IUTs used the opportunity to offer stand-alone *licence professionelle* degrees to upgrade their status.

cooperation between universities and *grandes écoles* through better coordination of programme supply and the joint provision of degrees (*politique de site, co-habilitation)*—a policy that was taken up by a considerable number of institutions. In the Netherlands, many *hogescholen* entered cooperation agreements with universities to ease the transfer of their Bachelor graduates into university Masters programmes. In Germany, access of *Fachhochschule?* Bachelor graduates into university Masters programmes was still handled rigidly by the latter. It seems as if the far-reaching formal change regarding unification of degrees was compensated by German universities in terms of less openness towards inter-institutional cooperation. In England, traditionally close cooperation between universities and HE colleges was further intensified through the joint provision of foundation degrees (see next section 10.2.2). Going even further than cooperation, **mergers** between HEIs of different types were discussed in Germany, the Netherlands, and France. In France quite a few smaller *grandes écoles* had already merged with universities; in Germany, one merger between a university and a *Fachhochschule* had occurred. In the Netherlands, universities and *hogescholen* can merge their boards, yet have to stay institutionally separate. This possibility was used by two pairs of institutions to maximise synergies from the delivery of different degree types under one roof.

An interesting commonality between the German, Dutch, and French HE systems is that the convergence of institutional types was also supported by the reforms of curricular governance (see section 10.2.3): in Germany and the Netherlands, universities and *Fachhochschulen/hogescholen* came under a single accreditation regime. It did not go that far in France, but the ministry responsible for HE advanced to some extent the integration of the *grandes écoles* into its national system of quality assurance. In England, universities and HE colleges were already under a common quality assurance regime.

Overall, the extent to which the adaptations of national degree structures could result in coherent policy change regarding the relationship between institutional types was limited in all countries largely because other defining features such as funding, personnel requirements, and academic pay were not adapted along with the changes in degree structures. Also, the reputation of the two main institutional types did not always change in parallel with regulations. In other words, adaptations between different formal features as well as between informal and formal features were unequal.

If implementation policy is left aside, overall policy change in relation to adaptations of degree structures in this dimension was highest in Germany, followed by the Netherlands and France, respectively. The fact that cooperation between institutional types increased somewhat less in Germany than in France and the Netherlands did not change this overall judgement given that this result anticipates the implementation sphere. The degree of policy change in England was considerable in this dimension, but took place independent of the Bologna process.

Table 10.3: Institutional types – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	Types of HEIs	Degree types in relation to types of HEIs	Degree levels and titles in relation to types of HEIs	Permeability/cooperation
Germany (1st) (H)	(L)	Unified: Both universities and *Fachhochschulen* grant theoretical-oriented and practice-oriented degrees, subject to accreditation (H) *Berufsakademien* can grant Bachelor degree, subject to accreditation (H)	Unified between universities and *Fachhochschulen* (H)	Formally improved: *Fachhochschul* Bachelor graduates can do university Masters degrees and in special cases may even be directly admitted to doctoral studies, but universities still handle this rigidly (HM) One merger between a university and a *Fachhochschule* (ML)
Netherlands (2nd) (HM)	(L)	Formally unified: Both universities and *hogescholen* can formally grant theoretical-oriented and practice-oriented degrees, no precedence case so far (HM)	Formally 'de-institutionalised', but remains differentiated in practice (HM)	Improved: Many universities enter agreements with *hogescholen* on transition of their Bachelor graduates, transition programmes are created (H) Two mergers of university and *hogeschool* boards (ML)
France (3rd) (ML)	(L)	Some approaches at Masters level: *grandes écoles* can grant state degrees (*diplôme national de master*) if they undergo state accreditation (ML)	Unified umbrella degree at level SE+5[b] in addition to differentiated degrees (ML) Improved cooperation between universities, IUTs and secondary schools for *licence professionelle* (ML)	Improved: Number of cooperation agreements between universities and *grandes écoles* increased, joint degrees (*co-habilitation, politique de site*) (HM) Some smaller *grandes écoles* integrated into universities (HM)

Country	Types of HEIs	Degree types in relation to types of HEIs	Degree levels and titles in relation to types of HEIs	Permeability/cooperation
England (4th) (L)/(HM*)	(L)	Conditions for university status changed: now possible for teaching-only and small specialist institutions (H*)	(L)	Improved through joint delivery of foundation degree (ML*)

a excluding implementation policy: the dimensional tables only report results with respect to policy formulation along the dimensions, and do not take into account implementation policies. These are dealt with separately in section 10.2.2. For England, general policy change in the dimensions that did not take place in relation to adaptations of degree structures in the context of the Bologna process is also documented, and denoted by an asterisk (*). Symbols denote degree of policy change: (H) = high, (HM) = high to moderate, (ML) = moderate to low (L) = low. The institutional setting in 1998, if unchanged, is not repeated. The first column contains a summative judgement of the rank order with respect to policy change in this dimension across sub-dimensions. In the case of England, two summative judgements are given, the second denoting the general policy change independent of the Bologna process. Please note that these ratings do not imply any normative judgement. The same holds for the respective tables in the following dimensions. For more information on how these judgements were reached, see methodological section 4.4. b The abbreviation 'SE' has been introduced to allow for comparison of years of full-time study upon completion of the secondary education required in the respective country to enter HE.

CONVERGENCE. Regarding types of HEIs and their relationship, the German, Dutch, and French HE systems moved—to differing extents—into the direction of the unified English system. This happened largely through the tendency towards harmonisation of degree levels, types, and/or titles in the three countries. As the English system moved on further to grant university status to teaching-only institutions, the overall convergence between the four HE systems in this dimension is weak. With respect to cooperation and permeability between different institutional types, there is a parallel trend towards an increase of both, but no real convergence between the four systems.

10.2.1.2   Causal reconstruction

ACTOR PREFERENCES. In all four countries, massification of HE and the demands of the knowledge economy on the function of HE provided important incentives for bringing different institutional types closer together; depending on the different history, these incentives came in different variations.

In Germany, the combination of massification of HE and the legacy of failed attempts at channelling increasing student numbers into the *Fachhochschul* sector triggered preferences of several actors for upgrading the status of *Fachhochschulen* and formally putting the degree programmes granted by universities and

Fachhochschulen on a par. The massification of the university sector had led to a substantial spread in the research-intensity of departments and the quality of degree programmes within the university sector. At the same time, some *Fachhochschulen* had managed to develop considerable applied research activities and reputed degree programmes. An informal convergence process between the two institutional types was thus already underway in spite of their formal differences. This made it less tenable to uphold a strict division of degree types between the two institutional types, and helps to explain the support of state actors and advisory bodies for measures to diminish the gap. The *Fachhochschulen* themselves had a strong preferences for the status gain implied by a harmonisation of degrees, while some universities were sceptical.

In the Netherlands, where massification was less of a problem and the university sector had remained comparatively small, state actors had fewer incentives to change the inherited task distribution between universities and *hogescholen*. It was mainly for funding reasons that the ministry responsible for HE was reluctant to allow *hogescholen* to grant degrees at the Masters level. The transparent funding system in HE (see section 10.2.7) made the additional cost of funding for an extra year of studies very visible. As the *hogescholen* already attracted 2/3 of students, there was no need to render them more attractive. Universities feared a loss of reputation of their degrees implied by a blurring of boundaries between the two institutional types. Employers too, were strongly opposed as they highly valued the provision of 'different types of graduates'. Finally, the nearly complete absence of research in Dutch *hogescholen* and the larger implied distance between the two institutional types made it less meaningful for *hogescholen* to argue for a harmonisation of degrees and titles. Just as in Germany, their desire to do so gave impetus to the Dutch reforms, but the differences in the inherited institutional setting and in the preferences of other actors help explain why there was less public support for these partial interests than in Germany.

In France, a key concern of the ministry responsible for HE was that the separation of universities and *grandes écoles* led to a waste of intellectual potential and thereby ultimately harmed France's international economic competitiveness, notably through the following two mechanisms: First, as the most talented students were pulled into the less research-intensive institutions, the elites in the public and private sector were not trained to do research and the research system was deprived of these talents. Second, as universities did not select upon entry, they had to cope with massification alone. For the latter reason particularly, it becomes immediately clear why the universities were supportive of a convergence of institutional types, and why the *grandes écoles* were more sceptical. In England, national preferences for the adjustment of criteria for university status can—similar to Germany—largely be explained by the pressure for further diversification of its HE system resulting from the massification of the system. Perceptions also played a very important role.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. In all countries, dominant mental maps ultimately served to legitimate and support the direction of change envisaged by state actors. Another commonality is that perceptions of how the HE system is seen from abroad provided important reform arguments.

In Germany and the Netherlands, the perception that the binary system was somehow at odds with the Bachelor-Masters structure was widespread, and triggered discussions on whether the introduction of such a structure would necessitate adaptations. The fact that the UK had recently unified universities and *polytechnics* and that the US-American HE system used the term 'university' for a wide spectrum of HEIs contributed to this view, even if the immediate causal link was not entirely clear. In Germany this perception merged with the interpretation of the Bachelor degree as an immediate exit point to the labour market for the majority of students (see section 10.2.6) in a way that made it hard to argue for a conceptual difference between university and *Fachhochschul* Bachelor degrees. In the course of the policy formulation process, the expectation spread that the introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure would in the long run render the distinction between universities and *Fachhochschulen* obsolete. At the beginning, the state actors and advisory bodies' perception that *Fachhochschulen* were doing a better job than universities in providing relevant HE at moderate cost to large numbers of students, certainly contributed to their willingness to approach the institutional types.

So why did these perceptions of tensions between the binary system and a Bachelor-Masters structure not lead to similar adaptations in the Netherlands? Apparently, the preferences of important actors did not support a similar interpretation as in Germany, which again goes back to different incentives from the inherited institutional structure. Accordingly, the idea that the introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure would necessitate adaptations of the binary system was rejected by the Dutch ministry responsible for HE early on, without giving a clear reason other than that the inherited system existed for good reasons and that it was valued by employers. The ministry was largely successful at curbing the debate.

While the French situation regarding universities and *grandes écoles* appears odd from an international perspective, from an internal point of view it was in line with national traditions and therefore self-evident. Accordingly, it was through his experience of the US-American HE system that the French HE minister was convinced of a need for reform (Allègre, 1993). By tying his argument to international competitiveness in the age of knowledge economies, he managed to get broader support for his view. But different from Germany and the Netherlands, the argument that a binary system as such was at odds with a two-cycle degree structure played no role in the debate, perhaps because both institutional types traditionally offered degrees up to the Masters level.

In England, perceptions of the international context did not support the government initiative to adjust conditions for university status. A generally

positive attitude of government towards private sector provision of HE played a much more important role, similar to the liberalisation agenda of the Dutch ministry. To the contrary, the Bologna process was even used by the university rectors' conference as an argument *against* the initial plan, which from its perspective implied a softening of criteria for university status that might undermine the reputation of British universities in Europe at large.

ACTOR CONSTELLATION AND INTERACTION. In all four countries, the changes that did occur were ultimately driven by the respective lower-status institutional types: *Fachhochschulen* in Germany, *hogescholen* in the Netherlands, universities in France, and HE colleges and private HEIs in England. The degree of policy change can be explained to a good extent by the degree to which the ministry responsible for HE took up those interests, as well as the degree of opposition from other actors in the policy formulation process. Such opposition was more or less explicit among the different higher-status institutional types (universities in Germany, the Netherlands, and England and *grandes écoles*/engineering schools in France), but the degree of resistance, the capability to express it, and the stance of government varied.

In Germany, where universities and *Fachhochschulen* are organised in one representative body, resistance of universities to the structural upgrading of *Fachhochschulen* implied in the unification of degrees and degree titles was not formally voiced at the national level. The German rectors' conference was actually vaguely supportive of such unification. This is very different from the Netherlands, where the attempts of *hogescholen* in this direction met fierce opposition from the representative body of universities. Given this situation, Dutch HE minister made only limited attempts at supporting the *hogescholen*, for example by bringing them under a joint accreditation regime and opening up the formal possibility for them to grant 'academic' degrees.

In France, the ministry responsible for HE had only modest capabilities to control the *grandes écoles* as their majority was overseen by a range of other ministries and local chambers of commerce. Its efforts were further impeded by the fact that the political elites were largely recruited from *grandes écoles*. Consequently, public support for reducing differences between both types was low in France. Given this power constellation, major *grandes écoles* didn't have much to fear and could simply evade reform for the most part. This held to a lesser degree for some of the smaller *grandes écoles* whose interest in entering close cooperation with neighbouring universities or even in merging was often driven by sheer survival considerations.

In England, the government's initiative to change the conditions for carrying university status was met by resistance of the university rectors' conference. Similar to arguments forwarded by Dutch universities against the right of *hogescholen* to award 'academic' degrees, Universities UK feared a loss of reputation for current universities. The reform was implemented against their

resistance, but they managed to push through a tightening of the criteria for taught degree awarding power to include the proof of active scholarship.

In Germany, the Netherlands, and France, the sequencing of policy formulation played a particular role. In Germany, the full harmonisation of degree titles was not intended from the beginning, but emerged in the course of the policy formulation process. In the Netherlands, tendencies towards the convergence of institutional types emerged in the course of the policy process in spite of the fact that the government had declared the binary system indispensable. In France the say of the ministry responsible for HE over the *grandes écoles* increased during the course of the policy formulation process to an extent unforeseen in 1997/98: compared to the gradual integration of *grandes écoles* into the *habilitation* system (see section 10.2.3 on 'curricular governance'), the creation of an 'umbrella degree' for universities and *grandes écoles* had been a light-touch approach.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. Comparing each of the HE systems in 1998 and 2004, it becomes clear that the formal and informal features of the inherited institutional setting strongly conditioned the outcomes, and are reflected in them. In all four countries the traditional formal role distribution, as well as informal status hierarchies between different institutional types are still very visible in 2004; a clear example of persistence.

In Germany, where universities and *Fachhochschulen* could formally grant the same degrees, their status and profile still differed by institutional type and was thus informally not the same. Moreover, as related formal features defining the differences between *Fachhochschulen* and universities such as funding and personnel were not adjusted, even formal policy change was not complete. Complementary institutions in related sectors such as entry regulations to the public service, were also only partially adjusted, further restraining the reach of the policy change achieved.

In the Netherlands, where the initial gap between universities and *hogescholen* was larger, degrees were not formally unified across sectors to begin with, but each institutional type got the formal possibility to grant degrees that were previously confined to the other institutional type ('de-institutionalisation'). Informal constraints such as different academic cultures, as well as other formal constraints enshrined in accreditation criteria, did however make it difficult or unlikely for HEIs to make use of the new option.

In France, where the initial gap between universities and *grandes écoles* was largest—regarding both formal features such as state authority and funding and informal features such as status and function in society—the formal convergence of institutional types related to adaptations of degree structures was also most limited. It was confined to the Masters level and remained a voluntary supplement for the *grandes écoles*.

In England, where cooperation between the university and the HE college sector was initially quite close, the change of criteria for university title alleviated

a formal distinguishing feature between the sectors—namely research degree awarding power—and thus contributed to their further convergence. The central role of research degree awarding power for the identity for universities constituted an important informal constraint that did however not prevent the government from imposing this formal change.

10.2.2 Degree structure

Building on the previous section, I now turn to degree structures, the focus of this study. For obvious reasons, both dimensions are interdependent. Degree structures in particular have traditionally formed a differentiating attribute between types of HEIs so that some aspects of degree structures were already covered in the previous section. The following section focuses on key differences in the degrees themselves, though as one dimension is germane for others, some repetition cannot be avoided. As this dimension is the focus of this study, it is treated in some depth.

10.2.2.1　Mapping policy change and convergence

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN 1998. Germany and the Netherlands were similar in terms of degree structures, while France and England were each unique: in Germany and the Netherlands, the degree structure broadly reflected the binary divide, with university degrees at the Masters level and *Fachhochschul/hogeschool* degrees below but without a tiered system; the degrees granted by both institutional types were conceived as final, not intermediate. France and England both had tiered degree structures, but in France it was much more fragmented and formally diversified than in England, where the established levels of Bachelor and Masters dominated the system.

In all four countries, a degree at the Masters level was established as an exit point to the labour market from universities, but the length varied: in the majority of programmes it was intended to be within four and a half years in Germany, four years in the Netherlands and England,[331] and five years in France. In Germany and the Netherlands, the *Fachhochschul/hogeschool* degrees could be broadly associated with the Bachelor level, but these were thought of as separate paths not as tiers. The Bachelor level existed in England *(Honours)* and also

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[331] There were exceptions in each country: in Germany, some *Magister* and *Diplom* programmes required more or less than 4½ years and programmes leading towards state examinations varied between three and 6½ years of full-time studies. In the Netherlands, programmes in science and engineering took five years full-time studies, and in England, research Masters programmes (M.Phil.) often took two years.

formally in France (*licence*), where it disappeared however between the exit levels below and above. Interestingly, Germany, France, and England all had a first '*caesura*' in HE programmes after two years, albeit with different functions.[332] Another commonality between the German, Dutch, and French HE systems was the existence of experience-related programmes that could be studied on top of the traditional degrees at Masters level. These were often also called 'Master' degrees in the style of the Anglo-Saxon system, so that students who opted for them acquired two Masters-level degrees in sequence. This redundancy was indicative of the lack of short first degrees offering real labour market perspectives in these systems.

The Dutch characteristic that *hogeschool* and most university degrees had the same length of four years while leading to different levels was justified by the fact that entry into a *hogeschool* programme required shorter and different prior schooling (see section 10.2.5 on 'access'). The fact that university degrees took longer in Germany than in the Netherlands—on top of longer schooling—did not prevent the two countries from signing an agreement of equivalence. In the French system, degree structures strongly differed between universities and *grandes écoles*: in universities, tiers after nearly every year of studies (2+1+1+1), in *grandes écoles* (including engineering schools) entry only after two years of preparatory courses, followed by an integrated programme leading straight to the Masters level (2+3).

The distinction of **degree types** came in different facets in the different systems: 'theory-oriented' versus 'application-oriented' in Germany, 'academic' versus 'higher professional' in the Netherlands, 'general' versus 'professionalised' in France, and 'research' versus 'taught' in England. The differences in terminology indicated different conceptualisations, and the dividing lines between the two types of programmes were not clear-cut in any of the systems. A differentiation that existed only in Germany and France was between state and institutional degrees, though the meaning was different.[333]

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[332] In Germany, the *Vordiplom* was an interim examination that conveyed no labour market qualification formally or informally, but assumed a selective function and marked the mastery of the basic methods and contents of the discipline (In the Netherlands, this function was assumed by the propedeuse after only one year). In France, the DEUG did convey a formal labour market qualification, but offered little opportunities in practice, and thus *de facto* assumed a similar function as the German *Vordiplom*. In addition, the technical DUT was an established qualification for mid-level technicians (as was the BTS, but this was formally not part of HE). In England, the one-year HNC and two-year HND were small-scale vocational alternatives in HE that also opened paths for the continuation of studies.

[333] In Germany, programmes in law, medicine, and teacher education led towards state examinations, reflecting either a high level of state responsibility in the field or a particular involvement of the state as employer. But institutional degrees, too, were governed by national curriculum frameworks and thus not free of state control. In France, nearly all university programmes were conceived as state degrees (*diplôme national*), referring to state control over curricula, but the state was not involved in examinations. Recruitment for public sector jobs was done through separate com-

Degree titles in all four countries were historically grown and differed by institutions, disciplines, curricular concepts, or a mixture of those. With the exception of HEIs in England, each institutional type granted its own degree titles. Within universities, degree titles were further differentiated, reflecting different (groups of) disciplines.[334]

Table 10.4: Degree structure – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	Degree levels	Degree types	Degree titles
Germany	Universities: SE+4½-5 (Masters level) *Fachhochschulen*: shorter SE+4 (between Bachelor and Masters level)	'theory-oriented'/ 'application-oriented' 'basic'/'experience-related' *Staatsexamen*/ institutional degrees	Universities: *Diplom* (Dipl.), *Magister* (M.A.), *Staatsexamen* *Fachhochschulen*: *Diplom (FH)* (Dipl. (FH))
Netherlands	Universities: SE+4(-5) (Masters level) *hogescholen*: shorter SE+4 (Bachelor level)	'academic'/ 'higher professional' 'initial'/ 'post-initial'	Universities: *Doctorandus* (drs.), *Meester* (mr.), *Ingenieur* (ir.) *hogescholen: baccalaureus* (bc.), *ingenieur* (ing.)
France	*Grandes écoles,* engineering schools and universities: SE+5 (Masters level) Universities also: SE+2, SE+3 (Bachelor level), SE+4 IUTs: SE+2 (sub-degree level)	'general'/ 'professionalised' (DESS/DEA, DEUG/DEUST and DUT, *licence/licence d'IUP…*) *diplôme national/ diplôme d'institution*	Grandes écoles: *diplôme de* (…) Engineering schools: *diplôme d'ingénieur* Universities: DEUG, DEUST, *licence, licence d'*IUP, *maîtrise, maîtrise d'*IUP, *ingénieur-maître,* MST, MSG, MIAGE, MSBM, DESS/DEA, *Magistère* IUTs: DUT

petitive exams, so-called *concours*. Besides the *diplôme national*, universities could offer their own institutional degrees which were under the sole responsibility of institutions.

[334] In Germany, the split was between the *Diplom* in science and the *Magister* in the humanities. In the social sciences, both degree titles were possible. In the Netherlands, all university studies except for law and engineering led towards the *Doctorandus.* In France, the disciplinary orientation at universities was not expressed in different degree titles, but only in different denominations appearing on the degree certificate. In England the main distinction was between the Arts and the Sciences, but fields such as Engineering, Education, and Law had developed their own titles.

Country	Degree levels	Degree types	Degree titles
England	Universities: SE+2 (sub-degree level), SE+3 (Bachelor level), SE+4(-5) (Masters level) HE colleges: SE+2 (sub-degree level), SE+3 (Bachelor level)	taught degrees/ research degrees	Universities and HE colleges: Higher National diploma (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC), Honours degree (BSc, BA, BEd, BEng, etc.) Only universities: Masters degree (MSc, MA, MEd, MEng, etc.) (except for some HE colleges with taught degree awarding powers)

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. To judge the degree of policy change in this dimension, I divide the analysis in two parts. First, I look at how the adjusted degree structure was designed in terms of degree levels, types, and titles; and what changes that implies compared to the initial setting. This analysis is no different from what I do in all other dimensions. Second, I compare implementation policies taking into account the degree to which a decision about the implementation of these changes was reached at a national level and the related mode of transition. The second part of the analysis prevents bias in the overall comparison in the degree of policy change: policies may imply radical diversion from the status quo, but if they are not accompanied by decisive implementation policies, the actual degree of policy change is lower than at first sight. I do not repeat this second part of the analysis for the other dimensions, as changes in them depend on the change of degree structures and thus are indirectly covered by the analysis in this section. I will however come back to the distinction in the overall analysis (section 10.3.1) to arrive at an overall judgement.

In terms of **degree levels**, Germany and the Netherlands both moved from one to two cycles, the French system made the transition from three (2+2+1) to two cycles (3+2) up to the Masters level, and England maintained its two-cycle structure while strengthening the sub-degree level at SE+2. For German universities, this transition implied a lengthening of studies up to the Masters level to five years[335] and the establishment of a completely new Bachelor level

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[335] Traditional programme length varied by discipline and between the *Länder*, but most *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes had a *de jure* duration of 9 semesters i.e., 4½ years.

after (mostly) three years of full-time studies.[336] At German *Fachhochschulen*, it meant the abolition of the well-established, mostly 4-year *Diplom (FH)* and its replacement by a shorter, mostly 3-year Bachelor degree[337] and a longer 5-year Masters degree. In the Netherlands the 4-year length of *hogeschool* programmes up to the Bachelor level and of most university programmes up to the Masters level was maintained, with the exception of research Masters programmes which could take two years (leading to a total of five years).[338] A new Bachelor level was created at universities after three years of studies.[339] In France, no new degree levels needed to be created. On the contrary, the transition from three to two cycles was brought about by the gradual abolition of two levels, namely the DEUG after two years and the *maîtrise* after four years. The total length of studies to the Masters level remained unchanged. England maintained the 3+1 (in some cases 3+2) structure. As the Foundation degree replaced other two-year diplomas that had existed, it was not conceived as a regular route to the Honours degree for the majority and seen as a 'sub-degree level degree'. Its introduction did not alter the overall English degree structure. Additionally, the introduction of a national framework for higher education qualifications served to better define the existing degree levels.

With respect to **degree types**, change was again greatest in Germany where the distinction of 'more theory-oriented' and 'more-application oriented' programmes was only maintained at the Masters level and de-linked from the type of awarding institution ('de-institutionalised'). In the Netherlands, the distinction of 'academic' versus 'higher professional' degrees was upheld, but also formally de-institutionalised. In France, the traditional divide between DEA and DESS was translated into the distinction of a research and a professional Masters, but the transfer between the two became more fluid and variable. In all countries, the adaptation of degree structures also brought about new degree types at the Masters level: 'consecutive', 'non-consecutive', and 'experience-related' (*Weiterbildungs*) Masters programmes in Germany, 'transition' (*doorstroom*) versus research programmes in the Netherlands,[340] and *diplôme* versus *grade de master* in France.

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[336] While the national legal framework allowed for 3-to 4-year Bachelor programmes, most institutions so far opted for three years and some *Länder* enforced this choice.

[337] Some *Fachhochschulen*, notably in Southern Germany, opted for 3½ years.

[338] Programmes in engineering and the sciences which previously took five years could be converted into three-year Bachelor and two-year Master programmes. Similarly, Master programmes in human and veterinary medicine and pharmacy took could take three years, in dental medicine two years, and in teacher training one to three years.

[339] Although four-year Bachelor degrees at universities were possible upon special authorisation of the minister responsible for HE.

[340] While the introduction of so-called '*top Master*' programmes (highly selective elite programmes), was intensely discussed, only a handful of these programmes were ultimately implemented, and only as purely institutional degrees without national policy framework.

All countries except for England introduced new **titles** for the Bachelor and Masters degrees, but the logic behind the chosen terminology was strongly bound by national context and difficult to comprehend abroad. The debates in Germany and the Netherlands were similar in this respect though the outcomes differed. Whereas the accretions "of Arts" and "of Science" were reserved for 'academic' degrees in the Netherlands (*de facto* only universities granted them), they could be granted for theory- as well as application-oriented programmes in Germany. Whereas they could not be granted for experience-related Masters programmes[341] in the Netherlands, there was no such restriction in Germany. And whereas subject-specific degree titles such as "MEng" and "LL.M." were ruled out in the Netherlands,[342] they were allowed in Germany. In France, the difference between what was called 'general' and 'professionalised' degrees did not manifest itself in a degree title debate, and the introduction of Anglo-Saxon degree acronyms beyond the term '*master*' was not even discussed. Interestingly, the possibility to replace the traditional degree title *licence* after three years by Anglo-Saxon terminology was not debated either. Instead the debate focused on the unique distinction of *diplôme* versus *grade de master*, which is at the same time a distinction of degree type and title. Given the absence of generic titles such as "of Arts" and "of Sciences" and the variety of programmes created by institutions, the agreement on common denominations became another important issue in France.

Implementation policy left aside, policy change was thus most pronounced in Germany and the Netherlands, which both moved or are still moving from a non-tiered to a tiered system, followed by France, which was and is still moving from one type of tiered degree structure to another. Comparing Germany and the Netherlands to each other, the German system changed even more as the degrees of both universities and *Fachhochschulen* were fully integrated into a single tiered system and the length of programmes was changed at both institutional types. In England the degree structure did not change except for the introduction of the Foundation degree, which has been gradually replacing the existing Higher National Diploma (HND) at the same level (see also section 10.2.6 on 'transition to employment'). This did remain a niche phenomenon however, and was moreover not linked to the Bologna process. Also, the existing degree levels were

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[341] "Experience-related Masters programmes" is introduced as a general term for what is referred to as "further education Masters programmes" (*Weiterbildungsmaster*) in Germany, as "post-initial" in the Netherlands and as "*post-diplôme*" in France—programmes that normally require considerable work experience and often account for this experience in their curricula. Some but not all of these programmes are work-based or part-time. No traditional English term exists for this type of programmes.

[342] Regarding law degrees, a legal initiative was underway in autumn 2004 to change this, but engineering degrees remain subsumed under 'sciences', except for the D.Eng. at the doctoral level.

formalised in a national framework for HE qualifications jointly with Wales and Northern Ireland. These results are summarised in the following Table 10.5.

Table 10.5: Degree structure – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	Degree levels	Degree types	Degree titles
Germany (1st) (H)	Universities and *Fachhochschulen*: Bachelor level (SE+3-4), Masters level (SE+5) (H)	Bachelor level: No degree classification (H) Masters level: More theoretical-oriented and more practice-oriented degrees, but does not show in degree title (H) Consecutive/non-consecutive/experience-related Masters (M)	Universities and *Fachhochschulen*: B.A./B.Sc., B.Eng., LL.B.; M.A./M.Sc., M.Eng., LL.M., free for experience-related Masters programmes (H)
Netherlands (2nd) (HM)	Universities: Bachelor level (SE+3), Masters level (SE+4(-5)) *hogescholen*: Bachelor level (shorter SE+4), Masters level at SE+5 becomes possible (HM)	'academic' versus 'higher professional', but de-institutionalised (ML) 'initial' and 'post-initial' Masters programmes, reflected in different degree titles (L) 'Transition' Masters, Research Masters, 'Top Masters', not reflected in degree titles (HM)	'Academic' degrees (*de facto* only universities, excluding 'post-initial' Master programmes): Bachelor of Arts/of Science, Master of Arts/of Science[343] (H) 'Higher professional' degrees (*de facto* only *hogescholen*): Bachelor of (…), Master of (…) (H) Students are entitled to continue to use the inherited degree titles for the new degrees (L)

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[343] A rectification law was underway in autumn 2004 to allow for more degree titles, such as L.L.B./L.L.M. and M.Phil., and to introduce the abbreviations B.A./B.Sc. and M.A./M.Sc..

Country	Degree levels	Degree types	Degree titles
France (3rd) (HM-ML)	Universities: All levels maintained, Bachelor (SE+3) and Master level (SE+5) (as well as doctoral level SE+8) 'highlighted' (LMD!) (ML) *Grandes écoles,* engineering schools and IUTs: No new levels (L)	At SE+5: *diplôme national de master* in universities and some engineering schools (HM) Research/ professional Master, but somewhat more permeable (ML) At SE+3: 'general' licence/licence professionelle (ML)	*Grade de master* as umbrella degree at SE+5 for *grandes écoles,* engineering schools and universities (ML) *Diplôme national de master* in universities and as additional option in some engineering schools (HM) *Licence professionelle* as additional diploma at universities (ML)
England (4th) (L)/(ML*)	(ML*) Existing levels formalised in national framework for HE qualifications	'Foundation degree' means that professional programmes at level SE+2 get 'degree status' (HM*)	'Foundation degree' gradually replaces HND and HNC (ML*)

ᵃ excluding implementation policy.

A different picture emerges from the second part of the analysis: the above rank order has to be adjusted significantly if the implementation policy is taken into account. In this respect, change was most pronounced in the Netherlands, which made the full transition in nearly one go in autumn 2002. It is followed by France, where the transition was and still is taking place in four 'waves', starting in autumn 2003 with some pioneers in 2002 (however, this only applied to universities; *grandes écoles* and engineering schools remained largely exempted from the transition). Third is Germany, where the legal framework for the new degree structure was set at the national level as early as 1998, but implementation was still neither compulsory nor voluntarily pervasive in most *Länder* by autumn 2004, and student participation low (8% in Winter Semester 2004/05 according to the *Statistisches Bundesamt*, 2006). England cannot really be compared to the other countries as the introduction of the Foundation degree and the development of the national framework for HE qualifications took place outside of the context of the Bologna process.

Table 10.6: Degree structure – Implementation policy

Country	Implementation mode	Timing of transition
Germany (3rd) (ML)	Legal basis in amendment of Federal HE Framework Act in 1998, allowing for parallel existence of traditional and new degrees. Design of new degrees specified by agreement of the Standing Conference of *Länder* ministers responsible for HE, but no common transition date agreed, no clear statement in favour of conversion. *Staatsexamen* programmes largely exempted. Implementation differs by *Länder*; amendments of *Länder* Acts making new degree compulsory under way in North Rhine Westphalia and Baden-Wurttemberg, many *Länder* apply softer policy instruments. (ML)	Unclear, probable until 2010, but no binding agreement or law except for a few *Länder*. (ML)
The Netherlands (1st) (H)	Legal basis in amendment of HE Act in autumn 2002, transition voluntary but based on consensus with HEIs, many of which made the transition beforehand. Length of transition period open (subject to further notice), but no new degree programmes in the traditional structure admitted as of autumn 2002. No subjects exempted. (H)	More or less completed (for new entrants) in 2002. (H)
France (2nd) (HM)	In four annual 'waves' starting from autumn 2003, using the periodical renegotiation of contracts between universities and the ministry. (HM) *Grandes écoles* and engineering schools largely exempted. (L)	Completion expected for 2007 (timing of last 'wave'). (HM)
England (Does not apply)	(Does not apply)	(Does not apply)

CONVERGENCE. Regarding **degree levels**, Germany, the Netherlands, and France converged towards the English model of a two-cycle degree structure but not in terms of length. This makes all systems more similar except for the German and the Dutch ones, which were already quite similar and move in parallel. The inherited similarity between Germany, France, and England of having a first '*caesura*' after two years is slightly weakened in Germany and France but strengthened in England so there is no convergence towards complete abolishment of this 'sub-degree level' in spite of the strengthening of the Bachelor

level. In England the *Honours* degree was traditionally the first degree, in Germany and the Netherlands the Bachelor degree was newly introduced, and in France the existing *licence* was strengthened as an exit level and complemented by the *licence professionelle*.

Degree length at the Bachelor level converged towards three years, although any length between three and four years was formally possible in Germany and the *hogeschool* programmes continued to take four years in the Netherlands. While the Honours degree usually took three years in England, four-year programmes continued to exist, particularly in areas requiring the mastery of foreign languages and/or a stay abroad. France was the only country with no variation in the length of degrees at this level. The length of the Masters degree also varied: Masters programmes took two years in Germany and France and (mostly) one year in the Netherlands and England. As a result, Masters degrees were granted after a total of five years full-time study in the former and mostly after four years in the latter two countries.[344]

Two considerations are important when comparing degree length and levels: first, differences in length, level, and type of prior secondary schooling have to be taken into account. For example, when judging the four-year Bachelor degrees from Dutch *hogescholen*, it has to be understood that prior schooling took 11 years, compared to 12 years for university access. Second, nominal length is not the only indicator of level given the different intensity of the academic year in different national and subject-specific cultures, a point stressed particularly by the English. With respect to **degree types**, England maintained the similar distinction of 'taught' versus 'research' Masters degrees, while Germany and the Netherlands converged towards the traditional French distinction of 'research' versus 'professional' Masters programmes, but the national conceptualisation and terminology differs. Additionally, a number of degree classifications emerged that were completely idiosyncratic to the respective national context. At the Bachelor level, only the Netherlands and France introduced a distinction between 'academic' or 'general' versus 'professional' degrees.

A similar picture emerges regarding **degree titles**. Germany and the Netherlands converged towards England in that they now shared an Anglo-Saxon terminology, though it continued to reflect national delineations. The same holds for the French distinction of *diplôme* versus *grade de master*.

To sum up, there was some convergence of degree levels, but not of length. Degree types and titles remained nationally conditioned to a great extent, in spite of some convergence of terminology.

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[344] In both the Netherlands and England, a total length of more than five years of full-time study could result from topping a three-year university Bachelor/Honours degree with one of the two-year research Master programmes. In the Netherlands, it could also occur if a *hogeschool* graduate chose to do a university Master degree (4+1).

10.2.2.2   Causal reconstruction

ACTOR PREFERENCES. In Germany, the Netherlands, and France, the ultimate motives for moving towards a two-cycle degree structure stemmed from the respective national context. In each country a variety of motives was behind the introduction, and led to concomitant changes in a number of dimensions of the respective HE system dealt with in the other sections. Nevertheless, a number of prevalent motives can be identified for each country which differ and help explain the patterns of tiered degree structures emerging until 2004. In Germany, a tiered degree structure had been discussed for decades as a possible solution to problems stemming from the massification of the HE system and the unfavourable distribution of students between universities and *Fachhochschulen*; evident in symptoms such as excessive length of studies and high drop-out rates. While the international competitiveness argument acted as a trigger for the reform, the main agenda was to use it as a lever for profound curricular and structural reform. This explains why the choice of degree levels, types, and titles contributed so much to approaching universities and *Fachhochschulen*. In the Netherlands, where such pressure was absent, increasing the international competitiveness of its HE sector constituted much more of a generic, intrinsic interest than in Germany. The choice of degree levels, types, and titles in the Netherlands was not meant to overcome the binary divide, and the incentives that later worked in that direction came from the inconsistencies between the logic of a two-cycle degree structure and a binary system. In France, where the Sorbonne-Bologna process was initiated, bridging the gap between the universities and the *grandes écoles* and improving the international 'readability' of the overly complex French degree structure were two aims of equal weight; both were meant to improve the system's international competitiveness. England is the only country where the international context was not used as a lever for reform, but on the contrary, seen as a threat.

This general picture shall now be more carefully considered with respect to degree levels, types, and titles, respectively.

Regarding **degree levels**, why did three years towards the **first degree** become established as the dominant model among the four countries without external enforcement at the European level? Preferences are one element of an explanation. In Germany, where both three and four years were possible according to the national regulatory framework,[345] preferences for the three-year model largely came from HEIs themselves. The large majority of universities preferred the 3+2-structure to the 4+1-structure as they found it hard to devise a sensible Masters curriculum in one year in the inherited semester structure given the traditional final thesis of six months duration. The length of the German university Bachelor was thus largely a result of 'backward reasoning'. German

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[345]   Only recently have some *Länder* ministries formulated clear political preferences for three years.

Fachhochschulen followed the model of the universities, partly because they feared competitive disadvantages from taking more time to offer the same qualification, and partly because they initially did not want to give up their *Diplom (FH)* after four years. In France, the *licence* after three and *maîtrise* degree after four years were equally well-established in the traditional system; French HE minister Allègre was initially indifferent between choosing either of them as a first degree. It was the German HE minister Rüttgers' argument which convinced the French minister: He argued that four years towards the Bachelor level, as in the US, would imply admitting that the European school systems were inferior—or at least not superior—to the US-American model. Subsequently, there was no further debate on the length of the first degree in France, while in Germany interestingly, the length was left open at the national level in spite of Rüttgers' argument. In the Netherlands, given that traditional university programmes in most subject areas took only four years in the Netherlands, it was 'natural' to locate the Bachelor level at three years; in fact establishing it at four years would have meant that Dutch university education did not lead to the Masters level and this was not even considered. Given the considerable gap between *hogescholen* and universities in terms of entry requirements, research intensity and status, it was equally 'natural' to locate the *hogeschool* degree after four years at the Bachelor and not at Masters level. In England, the *Honours* degree was already established and there were no incentives to change.

With respect to the total length of studies up to the **Masters level**, why was it unchanged in France and England, increased by half a year in Germany, and increased by one year (but only in special cases) in the Netherlands? And why was there no debate in Germany, France, and England and heavy debate in the Netherlands? In Germany, two factors from the national institutional context help to explain this: first, the HE funding model was so obscure that the funding implications of the increase in length did not come to the fore. Second, *de facto* length of studies was so far beyond *de jure* length that increasing *de jure* length by half a year did not seem to make a big difference. In France, there were simply no incentives to change the traditional length of five years total up to the Masters level. In the Netherlands, there were strong preferences from several disciplinary associations—partly supported by the national university rectors' conference—to extend the total length up to the Masters level to five years, meaning that Masters programmes would take two years. Similarly, *hogescholen* were very interested in being allowed to offer Masters programmes and receive public funding for them. The interest of the Dutch ministry responsible for HE in cost containment stood against both (see actor constellation and interaction). Quite different from the Netherlands, in England no actor was interested in increasing the length of the traditional, mostly one-year Masters programmes. To the contrary, English universities had become very reliant on the income from non-EU international ('overseas') students' fees. They feared that two-year Masters programmes would not be equally attractive for these students and therefore argued against adjusting

length. So in this case, there were strong preferences *against* change drawn from the international context.

Regarding **degree types and titles**, the difference between the German and the Dutch outcome has already been explained by the different incentives in both systems for decreasing the gap between universities and *Fachhochschulen/hogescholen*, respectively (see previous section 10.2.1). In both countries the interest to improve the international readability of their degrees was immediately translated into the introduction of Anglo-Saxon degree titles. As will be further elaborated in the paragraph on "actor constellation and interaction", the French characteristic to distinguish between *grade* and *diplôme de master* goes back to a conflict between the ministry in charge of HE and the *grandes écoles.* While the ministry wanted to bring universities and *grandes écoles* closer together, the *grandes écoles* were interested in maintaining their special position and reputation, expressed among others in their peculiar degrees. Given the strong inherited gap between the two and the weak control of the ministry over *grandes écoles*, the ministry resorted to a non-intrusive approach, namely the creation of the *grade de master*: As an additional umbrella degree it did not threaten any cherished traditions and offered only advantages to both sides. The duality between *grade* and *diplôme* was the immediate consequence of this policy choice, as the state *diplômes* of universities and the institutional *diplômes* of *grandes écoles* continued to exist alongside each other.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. Again, perceptions functioned to confirm and legitimate incentives in the four countries. Regarding the length of degrees, the increase in length of studies up to the Masters level by about half a year in universities (and one year in *Fachhochschulen*) went largely unnoticed and thus un-discussed in Germany. The perception that Anglo-Saxon programmes were organised in full years functioned as an important argument in this respect: It was used for initially disallowing 3½-year Bachelor or 1½-year Masters programmes, and for setting the Masters level at five instead of 4½ years of full-time study after secondary education (see KMK guidelines 1999). In all the other countries, traditional degree levels were set at annual intervals. In France, there was no perceived ambiguity about locating the Masters degree at the level of the former DESS/DEA, although the *maîtrise* after four years, which also included a final thesis, could theoretically have been discussed as an alternative. Similar to Germany, the dominant perception explained the non-discussion; the Masters level was perceived at five years in these two countries though this was generally not the case in England, and was not written in the Sorbonne or the Bologna declaration.

An interesting comparison can be made between the Netherlands and England: In both countries actors used perceptions of the international context to support their preferences: in the Netherlands to argue why one-year Masters programmes were untenable, and in England to argue why the one-year Masters programmes had to be maintained. In the Netherlands the predominance of two-

year Masters degrees in continental Europe was used to argue that one-year Master programmes would encounter recognition problems in other European countries; in England, universities feared that two-year Masters programmes would be less attractive for the (mostly non-European) fee-paying overseas students. To the English European developments were a source of concern rather than a model, as the incentives from the non-European international context in favour of the one-year length were dominant. The same European context that was perceived as an incentive for change in the Netherlands was perceived as a threat in England.

Differences in entry requirements with respect to prior schooling played an important role in justifying the different length of university versus *hogeschool* degrees in the Netherlands, while the argument was virtually absent in the German debate. This helps to explain why the Bachelor degree takes longer in Dutch *hogescholen* than in universities but (in principal) the same amount of time in German *Fachhochschulen* and universities.[346]

While English Honours degrees traditionally took three years full-time, continental European degrees of three-year length were not necessarily perceived as equivalent in England. The nature and level of prior schooling—an issue hardly discussed in Germany, the Netherlands, or France—played a very important role in this argument: The high degree of specialisation in traditional English A-levels was taken as a justification of why English students could reach a higher level in their subject area in three years than their continental European counterparts. The reasoning prevailed, despite recent relevant changes in British and continental European secondary schooling and university entry criteria.

Regarding degree titles, the policy choice to use the Anglo-Saxon terminology of degree titles caused little discussion in Germany and the Netherlands, where it was perceived as a necessity to improve the degrees' international readability. What escaped the attention of both countries was that their efforts of creating a coherent and logical system of degree titles and types—while justified by the need for international readability—were in fact nearly entirely driven by national concerns and national inherited delineations. In France, where improving international readability was also a very important motive, the replacement of the *licence* by an Anglo-Saxon degree title was not even considered. The French secondary school leaving exam was called *baccalauréat*, which explains a certain hesitation to use the term '*Bachelor*'. More importantly however, international competition in HE was generally seen by the French ministry to start at the Masters level, not below. In this respect the move from the initial spelling "*mastaître*" to "*master*" already amounted to a revolution. A particularly telling example of how perceptions of the European context were used to justify a

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[346] In both countries, entry into *hogescholen/Fachhochschulen* formally required a year less of schooling, but in practice, a considerable percentage of *hogeschool/Fachhochschul* students fulfilled the entry requirements for universities.

national policy choice is the French *grade de master*: it was interpreted as the immediate translation into national policy of the European idea of common 'degrees' as indicators of certain levels of study independent of a particular subject issue or curricular model. This also justified the maintenance of a variety of *diplômes* in addition to and besides the *grade*: they were meant to indicate different paths to achieve the same level i.e., *grade*. The fact that this French distinction is unknown abroad and that the terms 'degree' and 'diploma' have very different connotations in other countries is not generally known in France.

ACTOR CONSTELLATION AND INTERACTION. The length of the new degrees was only an issue of explicit political debate in the Netherlands. There the interest of the ministry in cost containment stood against the interest of disciplinary associations, and to some extent of the university rectors' conference, who wanted funding for two-year Masters degrees. The Dutch policy outcome—no general extension of the length of Masters programmes, but exemptions for well-argued research Masters programmes—was a compromise between these two interests. It shows that the arguments of the university sector partly convinced the ministry.

Degree titles were subject to massive conflicts in Germany, the Netherlands as well as France. Both in Germany and the Netherlands, universities strove to express the inherited divide between universities and *Fachhochschulen/hogescholen* as well as between related-degree types in degree titles. In Germany, this argument was less openly expressed at universities and *Fachhochschulen* were represented in one single organisation. Here, the ultimate policy output was to a large degree the result of learning in the course of the policy formulation process. While the initial version of the inter-*Länder* agreement envisaged different degree titles for 'theoretical-oriented' and 'practice-oriented' programmes at both Bachelor and Masters levels, the distinction was later abandoned as it proved impractical in the accreditation procedures—a clear example of a feedback effect from implementation into policy formulation. The distinction of 'theory-oriented' and 'application-oriented' programmes was maintained only at the Masters level, and without consequences for degree titles. In the Netherlands, the distinction of 'academic' versus 'higher professional' degree types as well as titles was fully maintained; a reflection of the deeper gap between the two institutional types and the weaker position of the *hogescholen*. In France the introduction of the Anglo-Saxon term '*master*' caused fierce discussions. First, because some *grandes écoles* had reserved the title under patent law. The national ministry responsible for HE first evaded the issue and chose the spelling '*mastaîre*' instead. Second, because '*master*' was seen as non-French terminology, an issue the French are particularly sensitive about. The peculiar French distinction between *diplôme* and *grade de master* did not as such cause any major argument, but was in turn the 'solution' to the underlying opposition between the universities and the ministry in charge of HE and the *grandes écoles* described above. The policy outcome was largely conditioned by the sequencing of the policy formulation process: in a first step, the ministry in charge of HE planned to only introduce the *grade de master* as an

additional umbrella degree. In the second step, it increased pressure to reform the underlying Masters-level curricula. For this purpose it introduced the *diplôme de master*, which could only be granted if the state accreditation process was followed. This condition, initially conceived for the university sector, also applied to the *grandes écoles.* Thereby the ministry created strong incentives for the *grandes écoles* to join the state accreditation process—they were obliged if they wanted to grant the *diplôme de master* (see also next section 10.2.3 on 'curricular governance'). It would have been unthinkable to design these reforms in one go, and it was not even initially conceived that way by the ministry.

In Germany, the sequencing of the policy formulation process also plays an enormous role in explaining the policy outputs, particularly with respect to degree length, but also to types and titles. The lengthening of degrees by half a year would probably have caused much more debate had it not been accepted long before it was clear that the new structure would be mainstreamed. Similarly, agreeing on the unification of degree titles for universities and *Fachhochschulen* was greatly eased by the fact that it extended at the time only to some niche degrees.[347]

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. A lot has already been indirectly said about how formal and informal features of the inherited HE system shaped the policy outcome in 2004; this section serves as a summary of these results. Formal change was apparently relatively easiest for degree titles, so that some convergence towards the Masters degree can be observed across countries even if the usage continues to vary between them. But also in this area, formal and informal features of the inherited institutional setting continue to shape the outcome. Examples are inherited gaps between institutional types and conceptualisations derived from a purely national context such as the French distinction between *diplôme national* and *grade de master* or the Dutch distinction between "Master of Science/of Arts" and "Master of [professional field or academic discipline]". Regarding degree length and types, the persistence of inherited and informal features was even stronger: obviously the length of the "new" degrees was not developed from scratch, but either mirrored the inherited system (France) or represented minor deviations from it (the Netherlands). The strongest deviations can be observed in Germany; the mechanisms which made this possible have already been explained. Certainly regarding degree length, widespread views on "time needed to degree"—and different times needed for

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[347] An example of such an unforeseen dynamic are the German *Fachhochschul* degrees: legally, any duration of the Bachelor degree between three to four years was possible according to the national framework. Theoretically, the *Fachhochschulen* could therefore have chosen to re-label their traditional *Diplom (FH)* into a four-year Bachelor degree. As they perceived their *Diplom (FH)* as above the Bachelor level, most *Fachhochschulen* decided to situate the Bachelor degree below at three years, and the Masters degree above at five years. When doing so, most of them were however not aware that this would imply the abolition of their traditional degree. When they became aware of it, it was 'too late'.

different degrees—partly also formalised in terms of professional entry regulations, go a long way in explaining this persistence. In the Dutch case, funding regulations and the context of austerity were important formal and informal constraints that explain the outcome. Looking more closely at degree types, these are often not formalised in degree titles and reflect deeply enshrined informal features of the inherited system such as variants of traditional distinctions made between 'professional' and 'academic' degrees, as well as between 'initial' and 'further' HE. I have shown in detail how these inherited categorisations are in tension with the two-cycle degree structure, so that adjustments to date have still to be considered as partial.

10.2.3 Curricular governance

10.2.3.1 Mapping policy change and convergence

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN 1998. This dimension shall be compared in three ways: the nature of the quality assurance system, the degree of curricular diversity, and the existence of national capacity planning. The four countries can broadly be sorted into two groups: Germany and France on the one hand, the Netherlands and England on the other.

None of the countries had an accreditation system in 1998. In Germany and France, degree programmes were authorised individually by the state according to formal, input-oriented criteria. Curricula were governed by national frameworks ensuring a high degree of formal standardisation, combined with a strong tradition of academic freedom played out at the level of individual course content. State authorisation was also used as a tool to ensure coherence of programme supply across institutions. In Germany, this took place at the *Länder* level, in France at the national level. In both countries internal institutional evaluation as well as external evaluation by public agencies existed, but were not very strongly developed.

In the Netherlands and England, a culture of evaluation was much more deeply rooted in the system; it substituted state authorisation completely in England and partly in the Netherlands. England constituted in a way the antipode to the French and German systems: universities' degree awarding power implied that they were free to set up programmes and design curricula without state interference. They even had the power to 'accredit' or 'validate'— this was the British use of the term—other HEIs such as HE colleges, to award degrees under their supervision. This system was complemented by audits and subject reviews carried out by peers under the auspices of a buffer organisation; the QAA. The effect of these audits was purely through the power of publicity and its impact on reputation and market competitiveness; the QAA had no formal powers to withdraw authorisation, although its judgements could in theory have

funding implications. 'Accreditation' in the continental-European meaning of the term existed only in a number of professional fields, and did not systematically cover the entire system. Curricular diversity—including diversity of degrees and degree titles—was accordingly high, and academic qualifications were not national awards. Nevertheless, national capacity planning was strongly developed; funding had a significant per-student component and every few years the parliament decided how many students it wanted to fund in which areas. The according capacities were then distributed among institutions by the funding council. Institutions were free to decide upon programmes within these broad areas and could also set up additional programmes if they could fund them independently.

The Netherlands constituted a mid-way case between Germany and France on one side and England on the other: the main quality assurance tool was formative evaluation through peer review organised by the representative organisations of universities and *hogescholen* under the supervision of a public agency, the Education Inspectorate. Curricular diversity was controlled by voluntary disciplinary networks that were more strongly developed in the *hogeschool* than in the university sector. This self-governance system was complemented by the obligation to have new programmes authorised by a national commission (ACO) whose task it was to ensure the overall coherence and efficiency of the programme supply in the country.

To sum up, state control over curricula was high in Germany and France and low in the Netherlands and England. Curricular diversity was low in France, low to medium in Germany, medium in the Netherlands and high in England. National capacity planning was in the hands of HE ministries in Germany and France, delegated to a buffer organisation in the Netherlands, and shared between the parliament and the funding council in England.

Table 10.7: Curricular governance – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	Nature of quality assurance system	Degree of curricular diversity	National capacity planning
Germany	No accreditation. Authorisation by *Länder* ministries responsible for HE, based on formal ex ante check of inputs. Some external and internal evaluation but not area-wide.	Low/Medium National curriculum frameworks (*RPOs*), but not equally important in all subjects	Only at *Länder* level, enacted through programme authorisation

Country	Nature of quality assurance system	Degree of curricular diversity	National capacity planning
Netherlands	No accreditation. Self-governed evaluation by representative organisations of universities and *hogescholen* under formal supervision of Education Inspectorate (delegated state responsibility)	Medium Some standard-isation through voluntary disciplinary networks, more pronounced in *hogeschool* than in university sector	Yes, national commission (ACO) decides upon set-up of new programmes on basis of 'macro-efficiency'
France	*Habilitation* (state accreditation).[348] Universities: Authorisation by ministry responsible for HE, based on formal ex ante check of inputs and periodic review of programmes (*habilitation*) *Grandes écoles*: No state control, some self-control through representative body, accreditation (*habilitation*) of engineering programmes by self-governed body (CTI, recognised by ministry) External institutional evaluation by national body (CNE).	Low National curriculum frameworks (*maquettes*)	Yes, responsibility of ministry, implemented in context of *habilitation*

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[348] The *habilitation* system has been explained in depth in the French case study, particularly section 8.2.3. As it is peculiar to the French system, the French terminology is maintained. If a translation had to be chosen, 'state accreditation' would come closest as the system allows for the organisation of material quality control of curricula and the underlying research base through peer review under the immediate control of the state. In 1998, state control was however still largely based on formal criteria.

Country	Nature of quality assurance system	Degree of curricular diversity	National capacity planning
England	No accreditation (with small exceptions). Degree awarding power of universities implies institutional responsibility for curricula, formative evaluation well-established. Subject-specific external audit by QAA, a buffer organisation between state and HEIs. Many HE college courses under responsibility of universities.	High	Parliamentary decision on publicly-funded capacity of HE places every few years

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. Germany, the Netherlands, and France used the Bologna process for far-reaching reforms of their curricular governance systems. The English system underwent significant change in the same period, albeit independently.[349] Both Germany and the Netherlands introduced accreditation systems, France reformed its *habilitation* (state accreditation) system and England modified and developed its audit system. Curricular diversity (formally) increased in Germany and France,[350] remained constant in the Netherlands, and decreased slightly in England. Germany, the Netherlands, and France adjusted their national capacity planning systems.

Although Germany and the Netherlands both introduced accreditation systems, the changes in the respective **curricular governance systems** as well as the outcomes were very different. In the Netherlands, an existing peer-review system was transformed and complemented to be able to provide a central, external 'quality label', while the German system moved from state authorisation

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[349] …although the English Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was heavily involved in the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and there will be some mention of the European Standards and Guidelines in the new audit methodology for 2006-11, which was still under preparation in early 2006.

[350] In both countries, anecdotal evidence from institutional levels does not fully support this system-level finding. It indicates that academics often do not perceive an increase of curricular diversity as politically intended but even a decrease, in Germany caused by the new authority of accreditation agencies, in France by the power of the bureaucracy to informally set directions. There were however no systematic studies available on this topic by autumn 2004 to clarify these contradictions.

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based on input criteria to a decentralised peer-review system.[351] Although France did not formally introduce an accreditation system, the reforms of the *habilitation* system shared a lot with the German impetus: from formalistic input control towards material evaluation of programme quality and conscious curricular planning by teams of academics. A trend shared by France and the Netherlands is the increased attention given to the question of whether Masters programmes were based on substantial research capacity. In France this criterion was applied in principle to all Masters programmes—though more strictly to those with a research than with a professional orientation—in the Netherlands in the strict sense only to research Masters programmes. England also shared the reform trend towards greater curricular autonomy of HEIs, but starting from a higher level. Between 1998 and 2004, the audit system was transformed and the subject reviews replaced by institutional reviews. These were only complemented by subject reviews in cases of concrete signs of deficiency. The audit was embedded in a wider set of tools for curricular governance referred to as 'academic infrastructure', including the national framework for higher education qualifications (see previous section 10.2.2 on 'degree structure'), subject benchmark statements, and programme specifications.

The reforms in all countries can be interpreted as efforts to find a new balance between what was seen as desirable **curricular diversity** on the one hand and the national coherence of degrees on the other hand. An increase in curricular diversity in Germany and France was achieved by the abolition of national curricular frameworks. In both countries, the abolished curricular frameworks did continue to serve as orientation marks however and disciplinary and professional associations and cultures continued to have a standardising effect. Informal change—in terms of common practices of the ministerial bureaucracy and accreditation agencies, respectively—was thus lower than formal changes in terms of the adapted regulatory and contractual framework (see also Krücken et al., 2005; Musselin, 2006).[352] In the Netherlands, the introduction of accreditation

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[351] In the Netherlands, the national accreditation organisation always took the final accreditation decision based on reports written by committees carrying out the site visits. In Germany, the accreditation agencies themselves took the accreditation decisions; they were in turn 'accredited' for that function by the national accreditation council. The Dutch accreditation system was unified with the Flemish one, and by early 2005 the first non-Dutch visiting committee was admitted. The German system remained national and was only formally open to international competition, except for one tri-national agency of German-speaking countries in business administration. In the Netherlands, Bachelor and Master programmes created by conversion of an existing programme received 'automatic' accreditation for a number of years (depending on the date of their last review) based on the argument that their quality was assured by the former system. Germany followed exactly the opposite logic: All Bachelor and Master programmes had to be accredited to prevent what was derogated as 're-labelling'.

[352] For the French case, Barraud & Mignot Gérard (2005) and Musselin (2006) argue that the accompanying measures of the reform of degree structures such as the mainstreaming of ECTS, modularisation, and competence-based learning, are leading to a standardisation of learning

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was associated with neither an increase nor a decrease in curricular diversity: accreditation criteria were generic and did not interfere with the curricular autonomy of institutions; this holds at least at the system level. Overall, the Dutch system was more successful than the German and French in beating back informal tendencies to re-regulate. It gave more curricular autonomy to HEIs in practice, perhaps due to their longer tradition in this respect. In England, the efforts of the QAA to establish a qualifications framework for England and Wales increased clarity on qualification levels and associated competences without interfering with curricula.

National capacity planning also changed between 1998 and 2004. In Germany, several *Länder* moved from one-by-one authorisation of programmes to broader planning in the context of contract management. In the Netherlands, the responsibility for 'macro-efficiency' was moved from the abolished national commission ACO to the ministry. In France, the ministry responsible for HE paid increased attention to regional coherence and efficiency of programme supply in the *habilitation* process.

Overall, change in this dimension was most pronounced in Germany and France, where the respective reforms implied the strongest break with national traditions. Although the Netherlands introduced a new accreditation system, the continuity from the inherited system was much higher. English reforms were also significant but did not take place in the context of the Bologna process.
Again, this judgement *only* refers to national policy formulation on the new system of curricular governance as such. The *de facto* reach of the new systems was not equally advanced by autumn 2004. In Germany, the Netherlands, and France, its reach depended on the speed of transition to the new degree structures. In Germany, the new accreditation system covered only a small percentage of overall programme supply (16% in May 2004 according to HRK, 2004h) because the transition to the Bachelor and Masters structure proceeded slowly, new *Diplom* and *Magister* programmes were hardly developed, and even among the new Bachelor and Masters degrees only a small percentage had been submitted for accreditation. In the Netherlands the transition to the new degree structure happened more or less completely in autumn 2002 and the new accreditation system already had a broader reach. Since all Bachelor and Masters programmes developed from traditional degree programmes were initially exempted however, only a few programmes had so far been accredited under the new system. In France, the application of the new rules for *habilitation* was tied to the rhythm of the contract policy that also conditioned the speed of transition. In

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modes while diversification of curricula takes place. They also interpret the creation of a common Masters degree for universities and *grandes écoles* as a standardising tendency. These aspects are not included in this assessment, and are dealt with in the dimensions 'curricula', 'degree structures' and 'institutional types'.

England changes to the audit methodology were introduced independently of any changes in degree structure, and the reference points of the academic infrastructure were incorporated into the audit process as from 2002.

Table 10.8: Curricular governance – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	Nature of curricular governance system	Degree of curricular diversity	National capacity planning
Germany (1st) (H)	Accreditation system introduced. *Länder* responsibility for quality delegated to new national accreditation council and six accreditation agencies, although authorisation of programmes by *Länder* ministries partly continues to overlap with accreditation function (H)	Increased: National curriculum frameworks abandoned and curricular innovation encouraged, although disciplinary/ professional associations and accreditation agencies continue to exert somewhat standardising influence (H)	Tendency among *Länder* ministries to give up case-by-case authorisation of programmes in favour of management by contracts, authorisation of broader strategic plans or automatic authorisation in case of accreditation (HM)
Netherlands (2nd) (HM)	Accreditation system introduced. Creation of national accreditation organisation (jointly with Flanders) and visiting committees, building on existing peer-review system (HM) Role of representative organisations of universities and *hogescholen* limited, role of Education Inspectorate diminished (HM)	Unchanged: no curriculum frameworks as basis for accreditation decision (L)	ACO abolished, function assumed by national ministry responsible for HE (interim solution) (HM)

Country	Nature of curricular governance system	Degree of curricular diversity	National capacity planning
France (1st) (H)	*Habilitation* (state accreditation) reformed towards greater institutional autonomy and initiative and higher importance of research capacity for Masters programmes. Creation of MSTP within ministry. (H)	Increased: National curriculum frameworks abandoned and curricular innovation encouraged, although practice of ministerial bureaucracy remains mixed (H)	Increased attention to regional coherence and efficiency of programme supply in *habilitation* process (H)
England (3rd) (L)/(H*)	Move from subject-specific review to institutional audit, introduction of 'academic infrastructure' (H*) 'Accreditation' of private teaching-only HEIs for university status introduced (HM*)	Decreased: some (efforts at) standardisation through national qualifications framework and subject benchmark statements (HM*)	(L*)

a excluding implementation policy.

CONVERGENCE. **Curricular governance systems** in Germany, the Netherlands, and France converged towards programme accreditation (although this was organised by the state and called *habilitation* in France, this is what it was basically about), while England maintained its audit system. In spite of these differences, there was overall convergence towards basing quality assurance on external peer review, as well as towards (at least formal) curricular autonomy of institutions. The systems converged from opposite directions towards a medium degree of **curricular diversity**: Germany and France showed the political will to increase the diversity of curricula and the autonomy of HEIs, while the QAA in England made careful efforts at increasing overall coherence. While **national capacity planning** was reformed in many countries, no overall trend could be identified. A convergent trend between Germany, the Netherlands, and France was to bring different institutional types under a common quality assurance regime (see section 10.2.1 on 'institutional types'). In this regard, Germany went furthest, followed by the Netherlands and France.

10.2.3.2   Causal reconstruction

ACTOR PREFERENCES. The difference between the newly created accreditation systems in Germany and the Netherlands can largely be explained by the different weaknesses of the respective inherited institutions and the different pressures for change resulting thereof. In the Netherlands the major concern of the national ministry responsible for HE was to overcome the limitations of a purely formative peer review carried out by the providers themselves in a small country. Accordingly, a national 'quality label' was stressed and the national accreditation organisation vested with a strong position. The early unification with the Flemish quality assurance system and the openness towards the admission of foreign visiting committees can also be explained by these efforts, although it was the Flemish who were most concerned about the small size of their system. In Germany quality assurance was traditionally the responsibility of the *Länder* who were unwilling to delegate substantial power to a national accreditation organisation, and therefore a much more decentralised system emerged. The German solution with several agencies and a weak national body at least partly reflected the federal system; the concession was that HEIs could now (at least formally) choose their agency across *Länder* borders. The main driving force for the German reform originated in the system of national curriculum frameworks that were increasingly seen as constraining by state actors and HEIs alike. The new accreditation system was therefore predominantly meant to allow for more curricular diversity and autonomy of HEIs. Another difference in outcomes can also be explained by the preferences drawn from different institutional starting points: in the Netherlands with its strong tradition of formative evaluation of degree programmes, all Bachelor and Masters programmes created from existing programmes were exempted from accreditation[353] for the first few years depending on the date of their last review, as it was felt that their quality was sufficiently ensured by the inherited system. In Germany, where systematic evaluation of programme design by peers had never taken place and far-reaching curricular reform ambitions were associated with the new programmes, accreditation was made obligatory for all Bachelor and Masters programmes.

Reforms in Germany and France were alike due to the similar political preferences behind them. The main impetus in both countries was to increase the curricular diversity and autonomy of HEIs. This interest was shared by the (university) rectors' conferences. In France however, the reform direction was challenged by other actors to a much higher degree than in Germany where it was nearly consensual (see paragraph on 'actor constellation and interaction').

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[353] At any rate, in the Dutch conception the term 'accreditation' could only be applied to running programmes, not to the quality check of the 'paper version', which is referred to as 'test of new programmes' (*toets nieuwe opleiding*).

The reforms of the English quality assurance system are a result of the tensions between the strong tradition of institutional autonomy and the public demand for accountability. This balance was redressed during 1998 to 2004 towards a further strengthening of autonomy i.e., the preferences of HEIs won out over the preferences for public control. The initiatives of 'subject benchmark statements' and a national framework for HE qualifications came from the QAA working with institutions and represented public preferences for national coherence.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. In all four countries, certain interpretations of the international context—European, Anglo-Saxon, global—were central for justifying national policy choices. Similar arguments were used in Germany and the Netherlands. In both countries, the (mis)perception that accreditation was '*the* Anglo-Saxon form of quality assurance' was widespread. Its introduction therefore seemed to be a logical corollary of the transition towards Bachelor and Masters programmes. This view remained basically unchallenged and greatly eased the transition to accreditation in both countries. It did not trigger a detailed study of Anglo-Saxon quality assurance systems, so that selected notions could become decisive for the design of the respective national systems i.e., that of a 'clear quality label' to signal quality internationally in the Netherlands and that of 'competition in a market of quality agencies' in Germany. These perceptions served to legitimise the political preferences explained in the previous section— the centralisation of decision-making power in the Dutch accreditation system and the decentralisation in Germany. Since the 'Anglo-Saxon' orientation played no role in France, another argument was used by the ministry to highlight the need "to allow French universities to propose their programmes and degrees", namely that this was "done by all important universities in the world" (MEN, 2002d). Backed up by this interpretation of the international context, increasing curricular autonomy of universities was legitimated as a central aim of the reforms.

Another linkage made in all three countries was that Bologna was not only about reforming degree structures, but basically raising quality of European HE to render it more competitive and attractive in the rest of the world (see also chapter 5 on European developments).[354] Increased institutional efforts in the area of curricular planning and quality assurance, and more care given to external quality control by public agencies were the logical consequence of that view.

The dominant English perception vis-à-vis reforms of curricular governance in the context of the Bologna process was defensive, namely to prevent Britain from being 'pulled backwards' by delaying influences from 'less developed' European

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[354] While these concerns had been constitutive for the Sorbonne declaration, they did not have the same importance on the international agenda throughout the Bologna process. In the course of the process, they became more important with the focus shifting from harmonisation between European HE systems towards the competitiveness of Europe as a whole (Prague Communiqué, 2001).

countries. The English starting point was so different from the three continental European countries—strong tradition of institutional degree awarding power and responsibility for programme quality assumed by institutions themselves—that the concept of 'accreditation' by an agency external to institutions was completely alien to the university system. Degree awarding power being constitutive for university status, it was in fact out of question to move into that direction.

ACTOR CONSTELLATION AND INTERACTION. It has already been mentioned that the German and Dutch achieved consensus on moving to an accreditation system relatively easily. Conflicts of interest originated largely from the design of the new system. In Germany, this concerned the influence of the national versus the *Länder* level on the one hand, and the influence of the *Länder* versus the national rectors' conference on the other. The effort of the federal ministry to establish accreditation as a national responsibility in the Federal HE framework Act failed; instead the system was built on delegated *Länder* responsibility. However, to differing degrees, *Länder* tended to retain some say through regulation or authorisation requirements in addition to accreditation, which created redundancies in the system. Tying the national accreditation organisation closely to the *Wissenschaftsrat* or to the national rectors' conference were only initially discussed as alternatives. But HEIs retained a strong position in the board of the national accreditation council and the composition of this board became a mirror of different stakeholders' claims for participation in control. Another important issue that became apparent in the policy formulation process was the tension between common national standards and competition between agencies. The solution found was that of general national 'minimum' standards combined with a significant degree of freedom for agencies regarding their implementation. Finally, disciplinary and professional organisations did not openly resist the abolition of the national curricular frameworks, but tried to reassert their influence through cooperation with accreditation agencies, a tendency still underway in autumn 2004.

In the Netherlands, where quality control over curricula was quite devolved to begin with and ambitions of the state to retain control were much less of an issue than in Germany; the concern was rather how to render the new system less dependent on the providers themselves—universities and *hogescholen*. Accordingly, the Dutch accreditation organisation became much more independent from stakeholder interests than the German council. Dutch HEIs insisted that accreditation criteria needed to be backed up by parliamentary vote against the intention of the ministry to deregulate this responsibility completely to the accreditation organisation. Another issue in the Netherlands was how to safeguard the formative function of peer review while using the information from the site visits for accreditation. A solution was sought by strictly limiting the information forwarded to the accreditation organisation. Similar to Germany, actors grappled with balancing the aims of common standards and competition in the system. It was solved by a comparatively liberal stance towards the admission

of new visiting committees, combined with strong powers given to the national accreditation organisation which retains the final say over each accreditation decision. As opposed to Germany, it was not at all clear from the beginning if universities and *hogescholen* would come under a single accreditation regime. That this finally was the case resulted from a combination of pressure from the *hogescholen*, a sympathetic ministry, and concessions made to the universities in the form of separate accreditation frameworks for 'academic' and 'higher professional' degrees (see section 10.2.1 on 'institutional types').

France is different from Germany and the Netherlands in that the overall direction of the reform of the quality assurance system was much less consensual. The abolition of national curriculum frameworks and the ensuing increase in curricular diversity was pushed through by an alliance of the ministry responsible for HE and the national university rectors' conference against the opposition of major student and staff unions. The latter feared that the increased freedom would challenge the notion of the '*diplôme national'*. The argument basically remained unsolved, but the formal solution was to maintain the '*diplôme national'* in the sense of immediate state responsibility for degrees while allowing for more variation within the system. Another issue was the quality assurance of the degree programmes offered by the *grandes écoles.* There was no public argument in this regard, but it was clear that the national ministry responsible for HE wished to increase its influence over these programmes and that *grandes écoles* tried to evade these tendencies. In the course of the policy formulation process, the national ministry responsible for HE managed to increase its grip incrementally by tying the granting of the degree title '*diplôme national de master'* to participation in the *habilitation* process.

In England, what looked like a dispute between HEIs and the government was openly carried out and intensively debated in the media. Behind it however, laid the more substantial conflict between HEIs and government with the QAA the agency caught in the middle. The dispute ultimately led to a change in the leadership of the QAA, with the new head being much closer to the university perspective.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. As in the previous dimensions, the formal and informal features of the institutional setting again appear as determining factors of the political outcomes in autumn 2004. In France, England, and to some extent the Netherlands, the inherited systems of curricular governance were not abolished but modified to account for new political priorities and changing paradigms: the French *habilitation* and the English audit systems were reformed and the Dutch peer review-based evaluation system was transformed and complemented to form a national accreditation system. In Germany a new accreditation system was set up, but its design was nevertheless strongly conditioned by inherited formal and informal features. For example, the decision for a relatively weak national accreditation council overseeing competition between several accreditation agencies has to be

understood against the background of a decentralised system assigning authority over degree programmes to the *Länder*. Also, the practice of authorisation of degree programmes by the *Länder* was not yet completely phased out.

To sum up, preferences immediately derived from the inherited institutional setting in 1998 provided the initial impetus for change in all countries. England is the only country where these changes were not driven by the ministry responsible for HE, but by the university sector. Perceptions of the international context played an important role in justifying the direction of change in all countries—positively in Germany, the Netherlands, and France; and negatively in England. The level of conflict over the general direction of change was relatively low in Germany and the Netherlands and relatively high in France and England.

10.2.4 Curricula

10.2.4.1 *Mapping policy change and convergence*

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN 1998. In Germany, the Netherlands, and France, HE programmes were **structure**d into a propaedeutic phase—two years in Germany and France and one year in the Netherlands—followed by two to three years of concentrated subject-specific studies. England was the only country that did not to follow this scheme, partly because prior secondary schooling was already quite specialised (see section 10.2.2 on 'degree structure').

The concepts of **modularisation and credits** were perceived differently from country to country and even within HE systems.[355] What is reported here is whether the programmes were modularised according to the country's own understanding. In Germany, modularisation was an unknown concept; although programmes consisted of small units, credits were not used. The Netherlands had its own national credit system with 42 credits per year and many programmes were modularised, which meant in the Netherlands that they were taught in 'blocks' immediately followed by examinations. In France, modularisation had formally been introduced in 1993 with two to three modules (*unités d'enseignement*) per semester in the first years of university education, but there was no practice of credit transfer across programmes. In England, no common national solution existed. Some HEIs had introduced their own credit systems and modularised their programmes and some had started to work in regional networks, while others were sceptical of the idea. ECTS was used in all four HE

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[355] It could simply mean to break down the programme into units, to increase or decrease the size of those units, to increase student choice—up to a point of arbitrariness—or it could mean the readiness to accept credits from other institutions. Therefore it is hard to make valid comparisons across countries.

systems in the context of European exchange programmes, but was not mainstreamed in any of them. The organisation of the academic year also varied from country to country: semester system in Germany, no prevalent model in the Netherlands, prevalence of trimesters but also existence of semesters in England. In France, in spite of the formal existence of semesters, studies were *de facto* organised by full academic years.

In Germany, the 'Humboldtian' ideal of freedom of research and teaching still provided the dominant **curricular model**. In conjunction with the massification of university education (see next section 10.2.5 on 'access'), it meant that students were relatively free to organise their studies, but received little guidance. This general description was more true for *Magister* than for *Diplom* programmes. In French universities, massification exerted similar pressure that was increased by the dominance of disciplinary thinking in programme design. Dutch HEIs had recently reformed their programmes according to the principles of student-friendliness and 'study-ability'; programmes were generally well-organised and student guidance well developed. This had gotten to the point where some complained about HE not being challenging enough. In England, the Oxbridge approach of student mentoring and tutoring provided the model for HE, even if teacher-student ratios did not allow for equal implementation in all institutions. In all four countries a clear concentration on one discipline was the standard model of HE, although the propaedeutic phase often included the basics of related disciplines. An exception was the *Magister* programmes in Germany which allowed for the free combination of two to three subjects. In England, so-called 'Double' or 'Joint Honours' and interdisciplinary offers in new areas such as business and media studies were exceptions from the norm.

France and Germany both struggled with the gap between *de jure* **and** *de facto* **length of studies**, although France discussed it slightly differently, namely in terms of the low percentage of students passing the first two years in one attempt. In the Netherlands, time to degree had recently been addressed by changes in student funding and the above-mentioned curricular reforms, so that it was no longer a pressing issue in 1998—and the problem was virtually non-existent in England.

Table 10.9: Curricula – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	Internal structure of studies	Modularisation and credits/ Organisation of academic year	Curricular culture	Gap between *de jure* and *de facto* time to degree
Germany	2-year propaedeutic phase, 2½ years of concentrated subject-specific studies at universities/ 2 years (including placements) at *Fachhochschulen*	Programmes *de facto* organised in small modules, but not conceived as 'modularisation'. No credits. Semester system.	Combination of 'Humboldt' and massification *Diplom:* Disciplinary orientation of programmes the norm, but basics of relevant neighbouring fields in the first two years. *Magister*: Students have large freedom in combining 2-3 subjects.	Pressing issue; immense gap, particularly in the university sector
Netherlands	1-year propaedeutic phase, 3 (in some subjects 4) years of subject-specific studies	Yes, since 1982. 42 credits per year. No national system for division of academic year.	'Study-ability' Disciplinary orientation of programmes the norm, but basics of relevant neighbouring fields in the first year.	No pressing issue, though to some degree the case in university sector

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Country	Internal structure of studies	Modularisation and credits/ Organisation of academic year	Curricular culture	Gap between *de jure* and *de facto* time to degree
France	2-year propaedeutic phase, 3 years of progressive subject-specific specialisation in annual rhythm at universities/in one go at *grandes écoles*	Modularisation since 1997, but no transferable credits. Formally semesters, but *de facto* organised in full academic years.	Combination of massification and discipline-driven teaching Academic programmes conceived as 'general', but strong disciplinary orientation early on.	Burning issue; many students need several attempts to pass the end-of-year examinations
England	3-year Honours with progressive specialisation. 1-year Masters, often highly specialised or 2-year research Masters	Modules and credits in some HEIs, wide variety of models. Trimester system prevalent ('terms'), but semester system also exists.	Tutoring/mentoring as 'Leitbild' but unequal degree of implementation Disciplinary orientation of Bachelor is norm. Some newer inter-disciplinary developments in fields such as business or media studies. Masters more often interdisciplinary, oriented towards professional field.	No issue, large majority of students completes programmes in time.

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. In Germany, the Netherlands, and France, the adaptation of national degree structures was used for curricular reforms. It is difficult to compare the ultimate overall degree of policy change in this dimension across countries because it depends so much on implementation within HEIs, which is not part of this study and still ongoing. But it is fair to say that in Germany and France, curricular reform was a constitutive part of policy

formulation at the national level, while it was largely confined to the voluntary initiative of HEIs in the Netherlands (which does not mean that it was not significant). With respect to national policy formulation, change was therefore more pronounced in Germany and France than in the Netherlands. No particular curricular reform trend can be identified in England from 1998 to 2004, except maybe the increasing development of 'Joint' and 'Double Honours' and other broader undergraduate programmes. In the context of the Bologna process, there was also a national initiative to introduce the Diploma Supplement and the acceptance of ECTS among HEIs was somewhat improved.

The inherited **internal structuring** of studies into a propaedeutic and a concentrated subject-specific phase was implicitly maintained in many programmes in all three countries that moved to a two-cycle system. This was less of a problem in the Netherlands than in Germany and France, where only one year was left after basic studies to prepare students for the first degree. In Germany and the Netherlands, the subsequent subject-specific studies had to be divided between the Bachelor and the Masters phase. In France, the restructuring only concerned the grouping together of the *maîtrise* and the DESS/DEA into a two-year Masters programme (*master*). In England, the introduction of the Foundation degree put somewhat more of an accent on the first two years as a phase of studies in its own right, but as this degree remained a niche phenomenon, the effect was limited.

The formal restructuring of programmes implied corresponding changes of undergraduate **curricula** in Germany and the Netherlands, where the constitution of a Bachelor degree necessitated the introduction of a small Bachelor thesis into university studies (compulsory in Germany and voluntary in the Netherlands). In Germany, the requirement that university Bachelor programmes also had to 'qualify for a profession' necessitated further curricular reforms than in the Netherlands, where this was not the case (see section 10.2.7 on 'transition to employment'). These changes were enforced through accreditation criteria which required German universities to restructure their undergraduate programmes with a view to professional fields. No such requirements existed in the Netherlands, but many universities used the reform for some broadening of Bachelor curricula, often through the introduction of a major-minor system and liberal-arts type education (so-called *academische vorming*, a concept similar to *Bildung*). In France, where the *licence* was already established as a traditional degree, curricular reform efforts at this level were independent from formal restructuring, but not less important. The reform was used to pursue a wide range of reform ideas, many of which had been in the air for years.[356] As the

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[356] Most had been around for a couple of years, such as improving student counselling, broadening the curriculum in the entry phase to allow for progressive student orientation, strengthening multi-disciplinary elements, and creating thematic 'tracks' to allow students to pursue individual

French created an additional degree—the *licence professionelle*—that was explicitly meant to qualify for the labour market, the reforms of the *licence* were less immediately geared towards employability than the reforms of the undergraduate curriculum in Germany. This was related to another important difference between the Netherlands and France, and Germany: while the broadening of the undergraduate curriculum was an important issue of debate in all three countries, it was 'crowded out' in Germany by the strict application of the requirement to 'qualify for a profession'. Institutions often tried to address the task by increasing specialisation, and thus strengthened the disciplinary concentration further. In the Netherlands, employers called for the broadening of Bachelor curricula to promote flexible thinking and lay a better basis for lifelong learning.

A common trend across Germany and the Netherlands was that institutions used the Masters programmes to raise their profile; which often implied increased specialisation of degrees. In both countries new Masters programmes— particularly in the early phase—were often driven by particular research groups. Many Dutch universities found it difficult to design one-year Masters curricula and used the opportunity to come up with new two-year research Masters programmes. These had to meet high demands regarding the training of students for research activities. The main challenge for French universities was to integrate the former *maîtrise* and the DESS/DEA into a coherent two-year curriculum. The inherited DESS/DEA distinction provided the blueprint for the division into a research and a professional orientation (see also section 10.2.2 on degree types).[357] In the Netherlands, only few Masters programmes passed the special check designed to ensure they were based on serious research capacity; not all disciplinary university Masters programmes without special professional focus automatically qualified. In France and Germany, all programmes were either classified as 'research-/theory-oriented' or 'professionally-/practice-oriented'. In France however, research Masters were checked by a special commission, whereas there was only one common procedure for all Masters programmes in Germany.

ECTS was made compulsory in Germany, the Netherlands, and France; the same holds for **modularisation** in Germany and France. For the Netherlands, this implied only a small adjustment of the established credit system, moving from 42 to 60 credits per year and slightly adjusting the size of modules. In France and Germany moving from teaching-centred to student workload-oriented curriculum planning required a paradigm change that was still underway in

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interests. All these aims were promoted by the ministry in charge of HE and encouraged through the *habilitation* process, but not rigorously enforced.

[357] Different models were discussed, such as the Y- T- and V-models (referring to different points of diversification of the common student body into a research and a professional track), but it is too early to assess the outcome.

autumn 2004. The use of ECTS in England remained voluntary and largely confined to those universities who used it in the context of European exchange programmes. Given the diverse views of their members on this issue, the British vice chancellors' conference did not recommend broad-scale transition to ECTS. Similarly, modularisation remained a concept used by some and resisted by other HEIs. France was the only country that used the Bologna process for a reorganisation of the academic year. Directly linked to modularisation, final exams after each semester instead of each year should help increase student flexibility and increase success rates (*semestrialisation*).

Both Germany and France used the Bologna reforms for serious efforts to shorten the **length of studies** to *de jure* length, but it is too early to judge the outcome.[358] In England, this was not an issue and in the Netherlands, it had been addressed by reforms of study finance before the Bologna process so the debate did not resurface in this context. In Germany, the shortening of *de jure* time to the first degree in combination with the modularisation of degree programmes raised the awareness that study time was limited and increased pressure on students to complete their studies in time. Modularisation and credits were used for the more realistic planning of student workload and led to a higher frequency of examinations, both of which also contributed to completion in time. The focus in France was on more student-friendly grading rules, improved student counselling and curricular design that allowed for progressive orientation of students.

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[358] A recent international comparative study by Heublein & Schwarzenberger (2005) highlighted that the *de facto* length of studies depends on a range of other factors besides the degree structure, such as the design of the access regime and the organisation of studies.

Table 10.10: Curricula – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	Internal structure of studies	Credits and modularisation/ Organisation of academic year	Curricular culture Skills/General education	*De facto* above *de jure* length of studies
Germany (1st) (H)	2-year propaedeutic phase formally abandoned, but often implicitly maintained. Specialised studies divided between Bachelor and Masters phase (H)	ECTS and modularisation compulsory for new programmes, often implies tighter structuring of curricula and, higher frequency of exams (H) Semester system maintained (L)	Bachelor: Regulations and accreditation criteria promote inclusion of skills and increased professional orientation (H) Masters: Tendency towards increased specialisation and inter-disciplinary orientation (HM)	Too early for balance, but strong efforts to shorten *de facto* length (H)
Netherlands (2nd) (HM)	1-year propaedeutic phase voluntary. Specialised studies divided between Bachelor and Masters phase (H)	Inherited credit system replaced by ECTS (ML) Unregulated organisation of academic year unchanged (L)	Bachelor: No ministerial policy and formal regulations, but informal trend towards 'major-minor' model and 'broad Bachelor' (HM) Masters: Tendency towards increased specialisation; new: research Masters (HM)	No major issue (L)

Country	Internal structure of studies	Credits and modularisation/ Organisation of academic year	Curricular culture Skills/General education	*De facto* above *de jure* length of studies
France (1st) (H)	Universities: 2-year propaedeutic phase maintained, but integration of first 3 years to *licence* aimed at. Masters: Integration of *maîtrise* and DESS/ DEA into 2-year programme (HM) *Grandes écoles*: largely exempted (L)	ECTS compulsory, modularisation more seriously implemented and transferability of credits stressed (H) Move to semester system (H)	*Licence*: efforts of ministry to increase trans-disciplinary elements, improve student flexibility and allow for progressive orientation, strengthen '*culture générale*', enforced through decrees and *habilitatio*n guidelines (H) Masters: efforts of ministry to improve rooting in research and 'multi-disciplinarity' (H)	Too early for balance, but strong efforts to increase success rate in early years (H)
England (4th) (ML)/(ML*)	No mainstream change besides introduction of 2-year Foundation degree (ML*)	ECTS applied by some HEIs, gradual spreading of local credit and modularisation models (ML) Trimester/semester system largely unchanged (L*)	Further trend towards broader, interdisciplinary honours programmes and attention to skills and employability (ML*) Diploma supplement introduced (ML)	Not an issue (L*)

a excluding implementation policy.

CONVERGENCE. The **internal structure of studies** did not converge as it still remained strongly influenced by the inherited systems. There is a clear trend towards the broad-scale application of **ECTS and modularisation**. England is the only country where this model was not translated into national regulation, but national interpretations vary substantially. With respect to the division of the academic year, some convergence towards a semester system can be identified. It is the inherited system in Germany and was introduced in France in the context of the Bologna process. In England and the Netherlands, no national models exist, but in England the semester was recently introduced by a number of HEIs along with modularisation.

The diversity of **curricular models** for the Bachelor and the Masters phase within countries and the deference of policy formulation to the implementation phase make it hard to identify convergence in this respect. Nevertheless, a common trend towards broadening the curriculum in the first years can be observed. It was particularly pronounced in the Netherlands and France and least developed in Germany, where it was counterbalanced by the pressure for specialisation derived from a peculiar interpretation of employability concerns. In spite of this overall broadening trend, the rooting of undergraduate programmes in a single discipline remained the dominant model. A small final thesis for the first degree is common but not compulsory in all four systems. Masters programmes are often quite specialised and profiled either as research- or professionally-oriented; they always included a thesis. Nevertheless, the pattern 'broad Bachelor—specialised Masters' cannot be identified as the dominant model; there are too many variations. Overall, with respect to curricular models I would say that the HE systems have neither diverged nor converged.

There is a clear trend towards identity of **de jure and de facto length of studies**—the two countries which had strong gaps between the two, Germany and France, made and are still making serious efforts to change that.

10.2.4.2 Causal reconstruction

ACTOR PREFERENCES. In both Germany and France, the massification of their university systems and the insufficient adjustment of universities to the increased and different type of student population created massive pressure for reform. This explains the political interest to link curricular reforms with the restructuring of degrees. In this context, modularisation and credits were embraced by both countries as instruments for curricular reform. The new degree structure was also an opportunity to acknowledge the fact that universities *de facto* had the task to prepare the majority of their students for a labour market outside of HE. This created additional reform pressure in Germany, where the first degree could only be earned after 4½ years of full-time study. France was not much better off as the degrees that could be earned after two and three years were not of much real value in the labour market. There was thus a strong preference of state actors in

Germany to establish a labour-market relevant first degree and in France to increase the labour-market relevance of the existing degree (see section 10.2.6 on 'transition to employment').

This pressure was absent in the Netherlands for two reasons: first, universities did not suffer from massification and second, serious curricular reforms to improve the student-friendliness of programmes had taken place a few years ago, programmes were modularised, and a credit system existed. The need for curricular reform was therefore not a major driver for the adaptation of degree structures in the Netherlands. It was rather an opportunity for innovative institutions to implement some ideas they had anyway. Nevertheless, there were some issues they wanted to address. One was the shortage of graduates in science and engineering. The major-minor model seemed like a good response; it was felt that the possibility for students to choose a minor from the arts and humanities might make it more attractive for young people to opt for a scientific track. Furthermore, employers argued that broader HE in the first years was an adequate response to the requirements of the knowledge society.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. A clear example of nationally-bound perceptions is the dominance of particular curricular models discussed in relation to the adaptations of national degree structures in the different countries. In Dutch universities, the major-minor concept and the related ideas of a 'broad Bachelor' and liberal-arts type education dominated the debate. Obviously these concepts responded to widely-agreed reform needs in the national context. The fact that the major-minor structure was central to US-American undergraduate education also played an implicit role. Finally, the role model function of some innovative universities that had started to implement the major-minor system even before the general reform of degree structures was important. In France, where broadening the first few years of HE was also important, there was no reference to any Anglo-Saxon or other foreign context, except the general argument that building the European HE area required increased efforts to improve quality. The catch-words were 'multi-disciplinarity', *culture générale* (referring to liberal-arts type education) and progressive orientation of students. In Germany, no clearly delineated curricular model for the Bachelor phase was prevalent. Nevertheless, the perception was widespread that the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes would be associated with the transition to some sort of an 'Anglo-Saxon' curriculum model. Modularisation, credits, tightly organised curricula, skills training, and early professional orientation were somehow all perceived as part of the same 'Anglo-Saxon' reform package and triggered the fear that German degree programmes would have to deeply divert from their 'Humboldtian' traditions. This caused massive resentments from students and academics, even if these were not always articulated by national representative bodies.

A very peculiar example of how perceptions are nationally-bound is the German 're-labelling' debate, which is without parallel in any of the other countries. In Germany, many actors voiced concerns with the 're-labelling' of degrees. Holding that a programme was 'only relabelled' was a serious accusation in Germany— while in the Netherlands and France, 're-labelling' was the common method of transition to the new degree structure, and nobody saw a problem with it. How can this be explained? In the German context, it was seen as completely self-evident that the introduction of Bachelor and Masters degrees necessitated fundamental curricular reform. The possibility that a programme was good enough to merit simple 're-labelling' was hardly considered. Although these aspirations were rarely spelled out, aspects such as the internationalisation of the curriculum and the inclusion of skills were generally expected as necessary ingredients of a serious Bachelor (and to some degree also Masters) programme.

Different perceptions of the concepts of 'modularisation' and 'credits' go hand-in-hand with different acceptance and design of these instruments in the various countries. Modularisation and credits being a compulsory component of the transition to Bachelor and Masters programmes in Germany, they were also perceived as 'Anglo-Saxon' concepts, and in turn associated by critics with a (super-)market model of HE and decreasing freedom of research and teaching. Concretely, 'modularisation' and 'credits' meant redesigning curricula with a view to student workload. In the loosely-organised *Magister* programmes, it was often the first time that academics had to engage in concrete and realistic curriculum planning at all. 'Modularisation' was also interpreted as combining existing course units into larger coherent blocks, which necessitated closer cooperation of academics. Compatibility of modules between—and even within— institutions with a view to student mobility was given little attention. In the Netherlands, where programmes were already modularised, the move to ECTS was a purely technical adaptation. In France, modularisation and ECTS were perceived as a European rather than Anglo-Saxon model. Here, the increase of student flexibility by *semestrialisation* was aimed for i.e., modules should not last longer than one semester. The need for larger coherent units was not discussed in terms of 'modularisation' but in terms of the creation of 'tracks' (*parcours*) as a way to allow for structured student choice within programmes. Furthermore, the portability and unlimited validity of credits was seen as a major advantage and innovation. Modularisation and credits were therefore seen as means to support student mobility, the recognition of prior learning, and life-long learning. In England, modularisation and credit systems were strongly associated with mutual recognition, and had therefore remained confined to small voluntary, often regional networks. Institutions therefore assumed that participating in ECTS implied the forced recognition of the achievements of students from other European countries. Combined with the traditionally strong autonomy of English universities, this explains the reluctance to impose ECTS as a national system.

ACTOR CONSTELLATION AND INTERACTION. The national policy formulation on curricular reforms that took place in the context of the transition to Bachelor and Masters did not give rise to particular argument in any of the countries. In the Netherlands this was because the state largely did not set requirements to this end. Reforms were initiated voluntarily by HEIs, and state actors in turn did not try to push HEIs further than they were willing to go. In Germany and France, this was because the need for curricular reform was unquestioned between the major national-level actors, notably the state and national conferences of heads of HEIs. Students and staff unions also generally agreed on this particular point. The only serious dispute with respect to curricular reforms at the national level was about additional state funding for cost-intensive elements of the curricular reforms such as improved student guidance and teacher-student ratios which HEIs in both countries called for but the state did not provide.

The level of conflict in initial policy formulation was also low because national policy formulation on curricular reforms remained relatively vague, so the real issues only appeared in the implementation process. This meant that the new curricular governance systems (see section 10.2.3) had to deal with the issues. Accordingly, these systems played an important role in shaping curricula in the new degree structure in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The German *Länder* delegated the task to formulate the accreditation framework to the accreditation council, which in turn left a lot of leeway to agencies and their committees in the individual accreditation processes. Given the abolition of national curriculum frameworks and the relatively weak tradition of curriculum planning in German universities, agencies developed a lot of influence and the system became highly decentralised, which makes it difficult to oversee the effects. In France the state retained control over the *habilitation* process, but the new academic commission (MSTP) gave disciplinary experts more influence on the outcome. The abolition of national curriculum frameworks (*maquettes)* had the double effect of increasing the influence of both the ministerial bureaucracy and universities in shaping curricula. Similar to Germany, this makes the ultimate impact difficult to assess. In the Netherlands the accreditation framework was developed by the national accreditation organisation with the help of expert councils, but passed by the parliament. It remained generic and there were no national curriculum frameworks to abolish or replace, so HEIs were really quite free in designing their own curricula. Again, this makes it difficult to assess the effect of the reform on curricula through this study.

At the level of individual HEIs, the curricular reforms did cause debate in all three countries that adjusted their degree structures (Germany, the Netherlands and France) because they required new approaches, caused a lot of extra work, or because local implementation was not sensible. These issues played a role in the national debate only to the degree that they were taken up by national disciplinary, academic and student associations or in the media. In Germany, the curricular reforms necessitated by the definition of the Bachelor degree as

'qualifying for a profession' (*berufsqualifizierend*) caused particular opposition from certain disciplines and professional associations (see section 10.2.6 on 'transition to employment').

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. Again, formal and informal features of the institutional setting played an important role in explaining the policies on HE curricula in the respective countries. In all three countries that moved towards the two-cycle degree structure, the inherited internal structure of studies (propaedeutic phases of two years in Germany and France, and one year in the Netherlands), were still visible as a more or less formalised structuring elements under the cover of the 'new' degree systems. In the French *grandes écoles* sector the inherited degree structure was so deeply enshrined that it was not changed at all. While there was a clear move towards modularisation and ECTS, their national use and design was so strongly coloured by the respective inherited systems that their implementation did not necessarily make systems more compatible. Such national—and sometimes institution- or subject-specific—interpretations included features such as the size of modules, modes of examining, and the transferability of achieved competencies. Finally, while there was some trend towards broadening undergraduate curricula, notably in the Netherlands and France, the tradition of relatively focused disciplinary programmes remained the dominant model for undergraduate education whether it was formalised in accreditation regulation as in Germany or implicit in evaluation practice as in the French *habilitation* system. At a more general level, inherited models of what constitutes good higher education, even if they were challenged and to some extent altered by the move to a two-cycle structure, did of course remain clearly distinct between the four countries.

To sum up, actors had strong preferences for curricular reforms in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. In Germany and France these preferences were shared by state actors and HEIs alike and were based on high problem pressure from the inherited system. In Germany, the need for profound curricular reform was a major reform motive for the transition to two-cycle degree structures that stood at the beginning of the process. In France, other motivations were more important at the beginning, but curricular reforms came in as an important theme in the course of policy formulation. Curricular reforms in the Netherlands were driven by HEIs rather than the state. The transition to two-cycle degree structures was taken up by institutions as an opportunity for improvement even if immediate problem pressure was comparatively low. Perceptions of Anglo-Saxon role models for curricula played an important role in the reforms in Germany and the Netherlands, but not in France. The conceptualisation of modularisation and credits differed strongly between all four countries and led to very different foci and designs of the respective systems. Policy formulation on curricular reforms was largely delegated to the curricular governance systems so that conflict was dispersed and decentralised and was dealt with in the course of implementation.

10.2.5 Access

10.2.5.1   Mapping policy change and convergence

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN **1998.** In Germany, the Netherlands and France, the respective **secondary school** leaving examination (*Abitur, VWO, baccalauréat)* in principle entitled one to enter HE as long as there were no capacity constraints (in France, this only held for university studies). In England, HEIs were basically free to select students on whatever criteria they liked, although two to three *General Certificates of Education at advanced level (GCE A-levels)* were commonly required. In practice, this did not lead to more restrictive access in England than in the other three countries—to the contrary, English HEIs offered a highly differentiated programme supply to a wide spectrum of applicants, including those who did not hold the classical secondary school-leaving examinations.

The German, Dutch, and French way of dealing with capacity constraints was different. In Germany and the Netherlands, capacity restrictions could in principle lead to selective access to any subject, while in France the majority of university programmes (all programmes leading to the DEUG) were completely open even in the face of severe overcrowding. Only *ex post* did the ministry adjust HE staff to increasing student numbers, but this adjustment did not always keep pace with developments. Basically the only way for French universities to select in these programmes was through examinations. In addition, a range of small selective programmes had developed in the university sector, most notably the two-year technical education offered by IUTs. Capacity constraints in the Netherlands rarely occurred outside of the medical field. In Germany, they could in principle render any programme selective, but in practice this was mostly the case in particularly popular programmes such as medicine, psychology, or business administration. In the case of nation-wide capacity constraints, distribution of remaining places occurred through central agencies in both countries; in Germany through a complicated system accounting for grades, social criteria and waiting time; in the Netherlands through a weighted lottery system.

The four countries' secondary education systems can be classified into streamed (Germany and the Netherlands) and non-streamed systems (France and England). A major characteristic of the former was the early streaming of pupils for universities and *Fachhochschulen/hogescholen*, respectively. Not only the type but the length of schooling differed, with 13 versus 12 years in Germany and 12 versus 11 years in the Netherlands. The divide in the school systems was even more pronounced in the Netherlands than in Germany. In France and England, the large majority of students stayed together for 12 years of schooling to achieve the *baccalauréat* and A levels, respectively. Selection for elite institutions such as the *grandes écoles* in France or top universities such as Oxford and Cambridge in

England was not formally based on the type of schooling, but on grades achieved (although informal ways to differentiate within the common school system existed in both countries).

Another difference between the four countries was the degree of specialisation of secondary education and the way that was linked to HE. The *Abitur* in principle qualified for any type of studies in Germany. Even though individual choice was possible in the final years, it did not restrict the subsequent choice of university subjects. In the Netherlands universities could demand a maximum of two subject prerequisites from secondary education, but did not always make use of this possibility. In France, there was a clear streaming within the *baccalauréat* into a general, a technological, and a professional stream; and the general stream was further differentiated into different specialisations (natural sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities). These streams partly conditioned the choice of subsequent studies. Specialisation of secondary schooling in England was highest; students normally studied only two to three subjects in the last two years of their secondary education, and many programmes demanded specific subject prerequisites as entry requirements.

Entry rates into HE are difficult to compare across countries due to the differences in what counts as HE in the respective countries. For example, Germany had a strong vocational training tradition so that many functions were assumed by the dual system that were catered for through HE in other countries. Furthermore, the OECD distinguishes tertiary education of types A and B (both ISCED level 5), the first including any HE programmes of a minimum of three years and the latter including for example, French IUTs and STS, English HNDs, and German midwife and nursing training (OECD, 1999). That said, Germany clearly had the lowest participation on both counts. All other countries let more than 50% of an age group enter tertiary education according to the OECD numbers. France and England catered for a large percentage of their huge intake through IUTs/STS and HNDs, respectively (see Table 10.11).

In 1998, France was the only country with a formalised **increasing participation agenda**: in 1985, the ministry responsible for HE had formulated the aim that 80% of an age group should achieve the *baccalauréat* by the year 2000. Given that the *baccalauréat* conferred the entitlement to university education, this aim implied massification of that sector. In the Netherlands, the need to increase participation in HE, particularly in sciences, engineering, and IT was stressed by the ministry in the context of the knowledge society, but no specific target had been formulated.

The question of **access to the Masters level** did not occur in Germany and the Netherlands with their long first-cycle programmes. In France, the same held for the *grandes écoles* which led students study straight to the Masters level after selective entry into level SE+3. Only in French and English universities was entry to the Masters level selective, and institutions could determine the criteria. In

French universities however, the first formal selection point was only upon entry to the DESS/DEA at level SE+5. At all levels below that, the exit certificate of the preceding level constituted the entitlement to enter the next level. But to enter a DESS or DEA programme it did not suffice to merely hold a *maîtrise*. Institutions were free to apply additional criteria, such as grades, motivation statements and interviews. In both France and England, real selectivity could vary depending on the institution, the subject area, and capacity.

Table 10.11: Access – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	Secondary education	Entry rates to HE/ Increasing-participation agenda	Access to HE	Access to Masters level
Germany	*Abitur* for university entry, *Fachhochschulreife* for FH entry, *Fachgebundene Hochschulreife* for FH entry and university entry in specific subjects. Streaming at age of 10-12, completion of Abitur at 19 (after 13, for some *Länder* 12 years), *Fachhochschulreife* at 18 (after 12 years of schooling)	28% (42%) Not formalised.	Open for holders of respective school leaving examination, subject to capacity constraints	Does not apply
Netherlands	VWO for university entry, HAVO and MBO for *hogeschool* entry. Streaming at age of 12, completion of VWO at 18 (after 12 years), HAVO at 17 (after 11 years of schooling)	52% (53%) Not formalised.	Free for holders of respective school leaving examination (subject to capacity constraints which occur only in a few fields)	Does not apply

Country	Secondary education	Entry rates to HE/ Increasing-participation agenda	Access to HE	Access to Masters level
France	Three types of *baccalaureat* (general, technical, professional). Streaming at age of 15. Completion at age of 18 (after 12 years of schooling)	37% (67%) Since 1985: *baccalaureat* for 80% of age group in 2000	Universities: Free for holders of respective school leaving examination in most programmes *Grandes écoles*, engineering schools, IUTs, some university programmes: selective	Universities: Free entry to *maîtrise* for *licence* holders, selective entry to DESS/DEA for *maîtrise* holders, institutions set criteria *Grandes écoles*: Does not apply
England	2-3 *GCE A-level* passes as gold standard, but range of other paths besides. Streaming at 16, completion at 18 (after 12 years of schooling).	48% (75%) Yes, in 1997 Dearing Report, focusing on sub-degree level courses provided in FE colleges	Selective entry, but wide range of opportunities, institutions set criteria	Selective entry, institutions set criteria

Note: Age indications in the first column are only approximate. 'Entry rates to HE' gives net first entry rate into tertiary education ISCED-type 5A (5A+B in brackets) for 1998 (OECD 2000: 173, C3.1.), except for France, where the numbers are for 2000 (OECD 2002: 231). The OECD includes French IUTs and STS, English Higher National Diplomas and German midwife and nursing training into tertiary education type B. For background information on the ISCED classification, see OECD (1999).

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. The biggest political challenge posed in this dimension by the introduction of two-cycle degree structures was the transition from the first to the second cycle. This question was dealt with very differently by each country. Germany decided that **access to the Masters level** would be selective and HEIs would be free to set criteria in addition to a Bachelor degree. Although implementation differed between the *Länder*, considerable capacity constraints resulted from the cost-neutral implementation of the reform, the increase of the total length of studies to the Masters level, and the political intention to improve teacher-student ratios. Taken together this implied that less

'places' than before were available in the Masters phase. Furthermore, the Bachelor degree was legally defined as a normative degree (*Regelabschluss*), judicially interpreted such that less than 50% of students would continue into a Masters degree. The precise way of dealing with these constraints differed between the *Länder*, but the trend toward selectivity at the Masters level was pervasive. A very different solution was found in the Netherlands: the National HE Act guaranteed access to a minimum of one Masters programme for every Bachelor graduate from a university, without any further requirements. Universities were free to set up additional selective Masters programmes in addition to that, notably research Masters programmes. Other '*top Masters*' programmes were discussed. Masters programmes from *hogescholen* were rare and always selective. Continuing into a university Masters programme was possible for graduates from *hogescholen*, and extra conversion programmes were set up for this purpose. In 2004, between 27% and 49% of *hogeschool* graduates— depending on the subject area—intended to make use of this possibility (*Onderwijsinspectie*, 2005:30); however only 13% of *hogeschool* graduates did in fact enter university Masters programmes according to the Dutch association of university vice chancellors (Van der Wende, 2005). In France, where the transition to two-cycle degree structures implied integrating the *maîtrise* and DESS/DEA into a single two-year programme, the question was if the selection point would now be moved forward from the entry of DESS/DEA to the entry of the *maîtrise.* This was formally not done. The regulation was left unchanged in this regard, meaning that selection would have to take place in the middle of the Masters programme. At the level of individual institutions however, different solutions were practiced. To sum up, with respect to access to the Masters level, change was greatest in Germany, followed by the Netherlands and France in that order.

One detail posed problems in all three countries that underwent this change, namely how to deal with access to inter- and trans-disciplinary Masters programmes and allow students to change institutions more easily. Even in the Netherlands and France, some form of selection was clearly needed in these cases. And in all three cases, the opening of universities for entrants from other national and international institutions proved a real task for the future as the admissions function that was traditionally missing at this level needed to be developed.

Although this was only indirectly related to the transition to two-cycle degree structures, **access to the first cycle of HE** also changed slightly in Germany and the Netherlands from 1998 to 2004. In areas of national excess demand, the scope both for good secondary school graduates to choose a HE programme and for HEIs to directly choose students upon their own criteria was increased in these countries. Furthermore, the Dutch ministry in charge of HE funded pilot projects to allow for selection by HEIs also in areas without capacity constraints, and initiated a change of regulation to mainstream these experiments. In England, an 'Office for Fair Access' (OFFA) was set up, and HEIs were required to outline

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how they assured that students from poorer families were not deterred by the introduction of variable fees (see section 10.2.7 on 'funding').

A number of countries formalised **increasing participation agenda**s for HE in the period from 1998 to 2004. The social democrat/green coalition government in Germany included the target to achieve an entry rate into HE of 40% in their programme for the second term. Indeed, among the four countries it made the single most progress in this respect, with the entry rate to tertiary education type A increasing from 28 to 36% between 1998 and 2003[359] (entry to type B even increased from 42 to 52%; see Table 10.12). In the Netherlands, entry rates remained static in the period. The aim to increase the number of HE graduates to 50% of an age group was stated in the 'draft HOOP 2004' (MOCenW, 2004c), but the quantitative target was omitted from the final document. The situation in France and England was characterised by moderate increases in entry rates to tertiary education type B, in France also of type A (see Table 10.12). As in the Netherlands, the French ministry formulated an increasing participation target aiming at 50% of young people obtaining some sort of HE diploma or degree. This however only took place in December 2004, based on a national debate on the reform of the school system and the Thélot report (2004). In England the Labour government formulated the target that 50% of 18 to 30 year olds should have attended an HE programme by the time they were 30, thus linking increasing participation and the life-long learning agenda. The policy was accompanied by tangible measures such as the introduction of the Foundation degree, lifting the cap on Honours degrees, and substantial additional government funds were made available.

A number of countries also undertook reforms of their **secondary education** systems that were independent of the Bologna process, but relevant for the intersection between school and HE and thereby for mutual recognition. In Germany, the shortening of length of schooling up the *Abitur* from 13 to 12 years was either implemented or planned by the majority of *Länder*. At the same time, there was a tendency towards standardising and centralising the contents of the *Abitur*. In the Netherlands, the final years of VWO and HAVO were fundamentally reformed: similar to the French general *baccalauréat*, students now had to choose between four profiles—culture and society, economics and society, science and health care, and science and technology—that conditioned the later choice of university subjects. The early streaming for different types of HEIs remained unchanged in Germany and the Netherlands. In France, a "national debate on the future of the school", initiated at the highest political level, was led since September 2003 (MEN, 2005a). Among the aims formulated for secondary education was to combine a common trunk of knowledge and key skills with more flexibility for individual student choice. In England, some broadening and

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[359] …and to 37.5% in 2004 according to the newest numbers from the Federal Statistical Office (2006).

diversification of A level education was brought about in the same period, and further reforms in this direction debated.

In this section, changes in access to the first as well as the second tier of HE have been analysed. The analysis shows that changes in the first tier, although significant, were mostly unrelated to the adaptation of degree structures. Therefore, changes in access to the Masters level are most important when comparing the overall degree of change, which was highest in Germany, followed by the Netherlands, France, and England in that order.

Table 10.12: Access – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	Secondary education	Entry rates to HE/Increasing-participation agenda	Access to HE	Access to Masters level
Germany (1st) (H)	Streaming unchanged (L) Tendency towards shortening schooling to *Abitur* to 12 years and standardising *Abitur* requirements (HM*)	36% (52%) 40% entry rate into HE formulated as target by social democrat/green coalition treaty in 2002 (HM)	Increased scope for selection by HEIs in areas with national or local capacity constraints (HM(*))	Selective, institutions set criteria, considerable capacity constraints (H)

Country	Secondary education	Entry rates to HE/Increasing-participation agenda	Access to HE	Access to Masters level
Netherlands (2nd) (HM)	Streaming unchanged (L) Reform of VWO content, different streams (sciences, social sciences, humanities) within VWO (HM*)	52% (53%) Increasing-participation agenda gets increased attention in context of conversion (ML)	In areas with capacity constraints, more scope for excellent candidates to select HEI and for HEIs to choose good candidates. Pilot projects to increase general scope for selection by HEIs. Change of regulation under way (HM (*))	Bachelor graduates entitled enter at least one suitable Masters programme at their home institution, further selective programmes possible, few capacity constraints (HM)
France (3rd) (ML)	"National debate on the future of the school" since September 2003 (ML*)	39% (73%) Target of leading 50% of age group to a HE degree (*diplôme*) formulated by ministry in charge of HE in December 2004 (HM*)	(L*)	Formally: Free entry to Masters for *licence* holders, selective entry to second year, institutions set criteria. Informally: some variation at level of universities (ML) *Grandes écoles*: Does not apply (L)

Country	Secondary education	Entry rates to HE/Increasing-participation agenda	Access to HE	Access to Masters level
England (4th) (L)/(HM*)	First measures to broaden and diversify secondary education, further reforms debated (HM*)	48% (78%) Since 1999: target to get 50% of 18-30 year olds into HE (about 43% in 2004), implemented mainly through Foundation degrees, additional funding made available towards this end (HM*)	Office for Fair Access set up , Schwartz admissions review published (HM*)	(L*)

ª excluding implementation policy. Note: Entry rates to HE are from OECD (2005), Table C.2.2 and refer to 2003 data. See previous table for definitions.

CONVERGENCE. There is clearly no overall convergence of the regulations for **access to the Masters level** in the four countries. While Germany adopted a model quite similar to the English one, both the Netherlands and France opted for solutions that largely ensured the persistence of the inherited situation, even if windows for further change were opened in both countries. In the Netherlands, through the possibility for additional selective Masters programmes in addition to the non-selective mainstream, and in France through the obvious inconsistency of selection in the middle of Masters programmes.

Regarding **access to the first cycle**, Germany and the Netherlands made very slight moves toward the English model that allows universities to select their students. Only in France did the university sector at large remain strictly non-selective. While **widening participation** became a shared agenda throughout the four countries and its realisation at least partly linked to the adaptation of degree structures, the actual participation rates continued to differ considerably.

As far as prior **secondary education** is concerned, the shortening of time to *Abitur* in Germany increased convergence towards 12 years of schooling prior to HE as the dominant model; only the 11 years of schooling preparing for Dutch *hogescholen* continue to divert downwards from this model. The reforms of curricula in the final years of secondary education all moved in different directions: centralisation and standardisation in Germany, differentiation in the

Netherlands, and broadening and diversification in England. No common model can be identified at this level.

10.2.5.2   Causal reconstruction

Given that change in access to the Masters level was the most relevant issue in the context of adaptations of national degree structures, the main question pursued in this section is why such different solutions were chosen to regulate access to this level. Why was access to the Masters level made selective in Germany, non-selective in France, while a middle road was sought in the Netherlands? As England already had a Masters phase prior to the reforms, the fact that no systemic change occurred in England needs no explanation.

ACTOR PREFERENCES. In all three countries, state actors and rectors' conferences showed a strong interest in increasing differentiation in the Masters phase and supporting the creation of programmes based on research excellence. In Germany this was discussed under the heading 'elite' programmes, in the Netherlands, they were referred to as '*top Masters*', which mirrored the more egalitarian notion espoused by the ministry in charge of HE of a 'plain with peaks'. A selective fifth year had already existed in France prior to Bologna, and the ministry intended to tighten criteria for Masters programmes to be based on research capacity and to encourage universities to design innovative programmes. Particularly in Germany and France, two-cycle degree structures were seen as an opportunity to simultaneously widen access and promote excellence. In all three countries, selection upon entry to the Masters phase was discussed as a political option to realise these goals. And in all three countries, student organisations opposed the idea.

   The countries differed in a number of conditions that brought about different political preferences. In the Netherlands this was the relatively low share of university students in the overall student population combined with the fact that *hogescholen* were quite clearly positioned as undergraduate-only institutions. Against this background, employers, universities, and the state agreed that the number of Masters-level graduates should by no means be reduced by the transition to a two-cycle degree structure. This interest outweighed the interest of selection across the board, so that selection was confined to niche programmes. In Germany, where universities were overcrowded and drop-out was perceived as a major problem, the interest of the state as well as of academics in restricting entry to the Masters phase was much more pronounced. Several *Länder* governments also saw it as a means to free resources to achieve better teacher-student ratios in the Bachelor phase.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. Another factor that contributed to the more 'radical' change in Germany was the implicit orientation towards Anglo-Saxon models. The selectivity was perceived as a major component of the transition to a two-cycle system. It was frequently argued that without such a selection, the Bachelor

degree would be a farce and not a 'real degree'. This argument was virtually non-existent in the Dutch and French debates. Another argument played a big role in the debate in the Netherlands that was again absent in Germany and France, namely that ensuring their own Bachelor graduates' access to the Masters phase was an institutional responsibility (*zorgplicht*) of universities. It was argued that if the completion of a Bachelor degree did not qualify for the according Masters degree at the same institution, this meant that the university had failed, not the student. This perception should be understood against the Dutch grading culture, which has a relatively high 'pass' mark and where it is completely acceptable to be just above the pass mark. In the Netherlands and France, the perception that selective entry to the Masters phase would be synonymous to cutting back student 'rights' was also important.[360]

ACTOR CONSTELLATION AND INTERACTION. The much stronger weight of student unions in HE policy-making in France and the Netherlands is an important factor in explaining the differences with respect to access to the Masters phase. In France and the Netherlands, their degree of formal involvement in the policy formulation process was much higher than in Germany, where the decision to render entry to the Masters phase selective was taken in the Standing Conference of the Ministers in charge of HE of the *Länder* (KMK). While student unions raised the same arguments in Germany as in the other two countries, they were not heard. In addition, France particularly had a very strong culture of student demonstrations, which was feared by government so that it was much more ready to give in to avoid such confrontation. Finally, student unions in France were backed up in this particular point by the major union of academics (SNESUP). Different from the German rectors' conference, the Dutch and the French university rectors' conferences did not publicly take position in favour of selection.

Another factor that explains the different outcome in Germany is the incremental nature of decision making: at the time that the regulations on the selectivity of Masters programmes were passed—which were not even regulations in the strict sense, but agreements between the *Länder* ministries in the KMK—the full transition to the two-cycle degree structure was still a vague and distant option, so that the 'radical' nature of this decision did not become apparent and even potential opponents did not voice their opposition very loudly. By the time the consequences became clear, it was too late for opposition. The more consensus-oriented political culture and the less fervent opposition of student unions in the Netherlands also contributed to the different outcomes. The

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[360] It is interesting that the shortening of the time to *Abitur* from 13 to 12 years in Germany was not discussed in the context of the simultaneous reforms of HE degree structures, although Rüttgers, the HE minister who had signed the Sorbonne declaration, had used the longer time to *Abitur* in Germany compared to the US-American high school as a justification for introducing three- instead of four-year Bachelor programmes (see chapter 5 on 'Europe').

Dutch solution was built on the understanding to allow for change without hurting anyone. And even for the selective Masters programmes that were allowed in addition to the non-selective mainstream, students successfully pushed for clearly circumscribed limits regarding possible criteria to prevent any form of 'discrimination'.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. All three countries newly introducing two-cycle degree structures started out from largely egalitarian traditions of 'open access' to HE. These traditions constituted important informal features of the institutional setting that were also reflected in national legal provision on access to HE. Given this similar background, it is striking how selective access to the Masters level could become established as the norm in Germany, but not (or at least not to the same extent by far) in France or the Netherlands. In addition to the important role of actor interaction in policy formulation and sequencing in particular, I hold that this outcome is an expression of an undercurrent of selectiveness in German mainstream education which had been in tension with existing HE regulation, and that the move to the two-cycle degree structure provided an opportunity to formalise it. This undercurrent surfaced before in the high drop-out rates, as well as in debates on whether the *Abitur* still provided a general qualification for HE. This informal tendency towards selectiveness was more prevalent than in the Netherlands and to some extent also than in France, where the 'function of selectiveness' was assumed in a somewhat isolated way by the *grandes écoles*, and professional education provided within universities.

An interesting example of uncoordinated adaptations of informal and formal features are the important reforms in secondary education curricula that took place in Germany, the Netherlands, and England without public debate of the implications for HE and for international compatibility. I interpret these reforms as an indication of changing paradigms—informal features—in secondary education. In Germany and England these led to frictions with complementary institutions in the neighbouring sector HE, because adjustment did not take place in a coordinated way (see section 2.5.1).

10.2.6 Transition to employment

10.2.6.1 Mapping policy change and convergence

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN 1998. The different facets of binary HE systems in Germany, the Netherlands, and France were also reflected in the transition to employment and in what was seen as the **first degree that qualified for the labour market**. The situation in Germany and the Netherlands was quite similar: They both had long first-cycle degrees at universities leading directly to the

Masters level as the first established entry point to the labour market; and shorter professionally-oriented first degrees at *Fachhochschulen* and *hogescholen*. The latter were perceived as equivalent to the Bachelor level in the Netherlands, but somewhere between Bachelor and Masters level in Germany. The French duality played out differently. In mainstream university education, France had a system with many formal, but few real entry options to the labour market below the Masters level, among them one after three years. The much smaller selective sector had both short two-year professionally-oriented programmes in technical subjects as well as long first-cycle degrees leading directly to the Masters level— but often starting only after two years of specific preparation—at the *grandes écoles*. England had a well-established first degree throughout the HE system which led the majority of graduates into employment, and a diversified programme supply at the Masters level. England was thus the only country where there had traditionally been an option to work for a number of years and then return to HE for a Masters degree. While experience-related programmes existed in Germany, the Netherlands, and France, they occupied niches outside the regular system and often did not have the same degree of recognition. England had, with the one-year Higher National Certificate (HNC) and the two-year Higher National Diploma (HND), short professionally-oriented higher education programmes not regarded as degrees. Similarly, the one-year Certificate of Higher Education (CHE) and the two-year Diploma of Higher Education (DHE) offered students the possibility to get their first years of HE certified to enter the labour market before completing the Honours degree.

The duality between institutional types in Germany, the Netherlands, and France was mirrored in different career perspectives for their graduates. However, the hierarchy was inverted in the case of France, where the future elites in both the private and public sectors were mainly recruited from *grandes écoles*, not from universities. **Linkages between HE and the public service** were weak in the Netherlands and England, but strongly developed in Germany and France through formalised correspondence between qualification levels and public career paths. In both countries, this pattern was emulated by the private sector; in France it was additionally backed up by union agreements regulating the linkages between HE qualifications and wage levels also in the private sector. The following Table 10.13 summarises the initial conditions in 1998.

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Table 10.13: Transition to employment – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	First degree seen as qualifying for the labour market	Degree of regulation linking HE to public service	Relationship between HE and private sector
Germany	Universities: Masters level, *Fachhochschulen*: between Bachelor and Masters level	High Separate career paths for university and *Fachhochschul* graduates In certain subjects, state exams (*Staatsexamen*) regulate access to teaching profession, law and medical studies	Separate career paths for university and *Fachhochschul* graduates replicated in private sector
Netherlands	Universities: Masters level, *hogescholen*: Bachelor level	Low Public service relatively independent in staff policy No state exams	Different career opportunities and salary levels for university and *hogeschool* graduates in private sector (depending on economic situation)
France	Universities: formally after two-years, in reality difficult below Masters level IUTs: after two years Engineering schools and *grandes écoles*: at Masters level	High Competitive state exams (*concours*) tied to qualification levels, regulate access to teaching profession and public service in general	Recruitment of elites in private and public sector mainly through *grandes écoles* Formalised links between wage levels in private sector and HE qualification levels through union agreements
England	Bachelor level (*Honours degree)* Below that non-degree programmes such as HNC, HND, CHE, DHE	Low Public service relatively independent in staff policy State exams independent from HE	Provision of programmes at Masters level for mid-career professionals well developed

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. The nature and degree of change in this dimension varied considerably between the four countries. The main difference is the extent of labour-market orientation of the university Bachelor. In this regard, Germany made the most ambitious national reform effort by trying to transform the

existing mainstream university programmes and establish a new entry point to the labour market at the Bachelor level for the majority of graduates. To this end, the Bachelor degree was legally defined as 'qualifying for a profession' (*berufsqualifizierend*).[361] The entry levels from *Fachhochschul* education to the labour market were also adjusted. While the regulatory framework for these adjustments was set by autumn 1998, and initial positive signals from employers could be observed, implementation was not yet compulsory in all *Länder* (see section 10.2.2 on 'degree structure'), and it was also clear that attitudes in both academia and among employers had not completely adjusted. If the reform succeeds, it will imply profound change.

In terms of the reach of the reform effort Germany is followed by France, which pursued a dual approach: After establishing an explicitly professional niche programme as an alternative to mainstream university education at the Bachelor level—the *licence professionelle*—it also made some efforts to increase the labour-market relevance of the existing mainstream *licence* programmes. Moreover, the incremental change from many to only two main degrees, *licence* and *master*, changed the relationship between HE and the labour market. So far, the *grandes écoles* sector remained unchanged in this regard.

Change in the Netherlands was very limited in this area: university Bachelor degrees were not intended to prepare for immediate entry into a job and the *hogeschool* degrees were relabelled without a requirement to adjust their length or concept. Nevertheless, both universities and *hogescholen* did reform their curricula in recent years. In this context, the efforts to broaden university Bachelor education—while differently motivated—were seen to improve the 'employability' of graduates. Although this was not explicitly intended—and not even desired by some—the university Bachelor could become an established exit point, simply because graduates equipped with a Bachelor degree can easily decide not to continue their studies and take a job.

England, like France, established an explicitly professional niche programme in addition to the mainstream Honours programmes. This Foundation degree is however, only two-years long and builds on the existing HNC and HND which shall be gradually replaced. While similar curricular reform trends can be observed in mainstream education as in France, they were not seen as part of the Bologna process by English policy makers and were not backed up by a national initiative.

Apart from these differences, some similarities exist between several of the reform approaches. Although Germany is the only country that made an explicit reform effort to legally install the university Bachelor degree as a labour market entry point for the majority of students, the actual curricular reform measures to

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[361] The connotation of the German term '*Beruf*' is somewhat less rigid than of 'profession'; as a '*Beruf*' need not be a clearly circumscribed profession such as lawyer, doctor or engineer. The term implies a strong 'vocational' orientation, but at an academic level.

pursue this goal were to some extent the same as those undertaken in France, the Netherlands, and England: broadening curricula by strengthening multi-disciplinary elements including transversal skills, facilitating progressive orientation of students, and improving tutoring to help them develop a labour-market perspective.[362] In Germany and France these curricular reforms were supported by explicit regulation and accreditation/*habilitation* criteria, while in the Netherlands and England they were, to a higher degree, left to the individual initiative of institutions (see also section 10.2.4 on 'curricula').

Another parallel can be found between the *licence professionelle* in France and the Foundation degree initiative in England—in spite of the difference in the levels at which the respective new degrees are situated. In both countries, national ministries made considerable efforts to involve employers and industry associations in the design and running of the new programme. Both initiatives have so far remained limited in scope, with few *licence professionelle* and Foundation degree graduates in autumn 2004. The small scale of the effort is thus the reverse side of the high demands on these programmes, achieved through cooperation with employers. While both degrees formally qualify for the continuation of university studies, they are explicitly designed for immediate entry into the labour market. At the same time, the French and English approaches are also fundamentally different: the *licence professionelle* is a professionally-oriented track in the third year of university education meant to provide an alternative to the more general mainstream courses in the common *licence*. The Foundation degree starts from the first year of HE and is meant to attract new target groups into HE which would otherwise not qualify for—or dare to—undertake an Honours degree. Although first signals are encouraging, it is still too early to judge the labour market acceptance of these new qualifications.

Regarding **links to the public service**, Germany and France are the only countries in which adjustment was pertinent. Among them, only Germany did so, and only marginally. It is now legally possible for *Fachhochschul* Masters graduates to enter the higher public service, but informal barriers remain. Formal requirements for major competitive exams to enter the public service in France remained at levels other than the *licence* and Masters degrees, and are thus in tension with the new structure. They are a major reason why some of the traditional qualifications such as DEUG and *maîtrise* continue to be awarded. In Germany, disciplines governed by state examinations such as medicine and law remain exempted from the reform; only in teacher education have initial adjustments been made. Such exemptions do not exist in the Netherlands as no disciplinary field is linked to the state in a comparable way. Only in the field of

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[362] As explained in section 10.2.4 on 'curricula', the broadening trend was counteracted in Germany by the pressure towards increasing specialisation stemming from a particular national interpretation of the employability requirement.

law does adjustment pressure exist as *hogeschool* Bachelor graduates can now in principle enter university Masters degrees and the question so far has remained open if they will be admitted to the bar. The following Table 10.14 summarises the nature and degree of change in the four countries in the dimension 'transition to employment'.

To sum up, the major change in relation to the adjustment of degree structures in this dimension occurred regarding what is formally seen as the first degree qualifying for the labour market, and this aspect is therefore given most weight in the overall assessment. In this respect, policy formulation in Germany was most radical, followed by France and the Netherlands. The moderate changes in England in this dimension again occurred outside of the context of the Bologna process.

Table 10.14: Transition to employment – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	First degree seen as qualifying for the labour market	Degree of regulation linking HE to public service	Relationship between HE and private sector
Germany (1st) (HM)	Formally changed to Bachelor level (H); informally still barriers (HM)	Remains high (L) Entry of *Fachhochschul* Masters graduates into higher public service now formally possible, but remains difficult (HM) First adjustment of state exams (*Staatsexamen*) only in teacher education (ML)	Separation of career paths for university and *Fachhochschul* graduates in private sector challenged, but too early to assess change in practice (HM)
Netherlands (3rd) (L)	Formally unchanged: Universities: Masters level, *hogescholen*: Bachelor level (L) Informally: University Bachelor graduates have option to enter labour market (ML)	Remains low (L) Public service remains relatively independent in staff policy (L) No state exams as before (L)	Separate career paths for university and *hogeschool* graduates in private sector unchanged (L)

Country	First degree seen as qualifying for the labour market	Degree of regulation linking HE to public service	Relationship between HE and private sector
France (2nd) (ML)	Universities: Bachelor level gets more weight (*licence, licence professionelle*), but options below and above formally remain (ML) IUTs: still after two years, but option to continue into *licence professionelle* (ML) *Grandes écoles*: unchanged at Masters level (L)	Remains high (L) Qualification levels for competitive state exams (*concours*) not adjusted to two-cycle degree structure (L)	Recruitment of elites in private and public sector mainly through *grandes écoles* unchanged (L) Formalised links between wage levels in private sector and HE qualification levels through union agreements (L)
England (4th) (L)/(ML*)	Remains at Bachelor level, but some ambiguity about Foundation degree as "sub-degree level degree" which gradually replaces HND and strengthens formal labour market entry level after two years of HE (ML*)	Remains low (L*) Public service remains relatively independent in staff policy (L*) State exams continue to be independent from HE (L*)	Provision of programmes at Masters level for mid-career professionals remains well developed (L*) Employability and skills of graduates are key government priority (HM*)

^a excluding implementation policy.

DEGREE OF CONVERGENCE. Regarding a degree at the Bachelor level as a possible entry point into the labour market, Germany—and to some extent the Netherlands and France—converged towards the English model, but important differences persist. In England, the fact that the majority of graduates find employment after the Bachelor degree is rooted in traditions and expectations of employers regarding the competences of graduates and not enforced by any type of formal legislation. Among the reform countries, Germany is the only one that rigorously sought to establish the Bachelor degree as the regular exit point to the labour market by legally defining it as 'qualifying for a profession' and systematically restricting access to the Masters level. In France, the general *licence* moved in the direction of greater labour market relevance, but only the *licence*

professionelle was meant to immediately prepare for the labour market. In the Netherlands, the Bachelor degree was the regular entry point for *hogeschool* graduates, but this remained a theoretical possibility for university students. A common trend across countries are curricular reforms that were in one way or the other, intended to increase the employability of first-cycle graduates.

Another persisting difference concerns the question of what constitutes the first degree. With the Foundation degree in England and two-year professional programmes in France, particularly in the technical field, two countries continue to have a first degree below the Bachelor level. Finally, there is no convergence regarding the degree of regulation linking HE to the public service: This remains high in Germany and France and low in the Netherlands and England.

10.2.6.2   Causal reconstruction

ACTOR PREFERENCES. The extent of massification of HE, and the way it was dealt with appear as an important explanations for the differences in the reforms undertaken by the four countries in this area.

In both Germany and France, massification of university education created high pressure to professionalise university degrees, but the way the two countries went about this pressure prior to the Bologna process differed. In spite of a history of reform debate and failed efforts, Germany had so far not really managed to formulate policy responses to the problem at all. As a consequence there were strong national preferences for establishing a labour-market relevant first degree in the German university system. Budgetary constraints also created incentives for *Länder* governments to push for the Bachelor degree as an entry point to the labour market. France had a history of state initiatives to create professionally-oriented university degrees at several levels, notably after two, four, and five years of HE, but always as small niche offers in addition to the large mainstream system. 'Bologna' was thus seized as an opportunity to create another professionally-oriented degree, this time after three years of university education—the only level at which such a degree did not yet exist. The duality of "general" versus "professionalising" degrees persisted, and the solution to the large-scale massification problem continued to be mainly sought in small-scale niche solutions.

In the Netherlands, massification pressure was absent from the universities, mainly because increases in student numbers in the decade prior to the Bologna process were moderate and largely absorbed by the *hogescholen*, which offered professional degrees at moderate costs. This largely explains why there was no effort to establish a labour-market relevant first degree at universities. To the contrary, a scarcity of Masters graduates, particularly in the science and technology field, meant that the university sector was interested in not reducing the number of university graduates at this level through the adaptation of novel degree structures. For the HE sector as a whole, this situation created an incentive

to engage in the reform with a view to increasing the number of HE graduates in the long run by improving opportunities for life-long learning.

Massification pressure did exist in England. Even more explicitly than adaptations of national degree structures in Germany and France, the Foundation degree was positioned as an instrument to widen participation. It was driven by a clear Labour party agenda to make HE accessible for social groups that would otherwise not have opted for it. But why did the massification pressure in England result in the creation of a "sub-degree level degree" after only two years of HE? There are three possible explanations: first, the Honours degree was already established as an entry point to the labour market; second, the English HE system had to cope with a higher level of HE participation than Germany and France, heading for rates of 50% of an age group, and third; the English debate was remarkably untouched by the Bologna process.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. Dominant mental maps seem to have served to confirm and justify the above-described incentives. This is exemplified by the formulation of the Bologna declaration that the first degree has to be "relevant to the European labour market". In Germany, this was translated directly into a strict requirement in the Federal HE Framework Act that the Bachelor degree had to "qualify for a profession"—a requirement that formally also held for the traditional degrees, but was taken much more seriously for the new Bachelor degrees. The dominant perception in Germany was that this requirement was derived immediately from the Bologna declaration. The far-reaching German policy choice to establish the university Bachelor degree as a regular entry point to the labour market was thus justified by a particular interpretation of the European agreement, and alternative interpretations and accordant policy options were not even discussed.

In the Netherlands, the identical phrase of the Bologna declaration regarding the labour-market relevance of the first degree did not play a role in the national reform debate. Accordingly, the fact that the Dutch university Bachelor degree was not designed to prepare for entry to the labour market was generally not seen as problematic or at odds with European requirements, and the voices that raised the issue remained rare and did not gain weight. Exceptions were the *hogescholen*, which liked to stress that their degrees "fulfilled the Bologna requirements", and the student union LSVb which raised more general issues about what they saw as inconsistencies between the conceptualisation of degrees in the university versus the *hogeschool* sector. An aspect of the Bologna declaration present in the Dutch debate was the concept of 'employability', largely interpreted in terms of lifelong learning.

Nationally and internationally, the *licence professionelle* was presented by the French ministry in charge of HE as the immediate translation of the respective phrases in the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations into national policies. The curricular reforms in the general *licence* were only undertaken in a second step, and although they potentially also contributed to the labour market relevance of these degrees, they were not discussed in this context. There was no sign of

awareness that the creation of an additional niche degree might not be a sufficient response; in fact such debate was absent at the national level. Maybe this is because the French 'tradition' to create "professionalising" degrees in addition to the mainstream system was so dominant that the creation of one more degree of this type seemed a natural way to deal with the issue.

A notable observation concerning England is that while the Foundation degree initiative was pursued more or less in parallel to the Bologna process and shared a similar impetus as the proliferation of the first degree in Europe, perceptions of the Bologna process played no role in it. The introduction of the Foundation degree was independent of Bologna and exclusively driven by perceived national requirements.

Finally, one aspect explicitly formulated in the Bologna declaration, namely that the first degree should be relevant to the *European* labour market, did not play an important role in national policy formulation in any of the countries.

ACTOR CONSTELLATIONS AND INTERACTION. Actor constellations and the nature of policy formulation in this dimension display a surprising degree of variety between the four countries. In Germany, the incremental nature of the policy formulation process is once more key to understanding the policy outcome in this dimension. It helped policy makers in the Federal Ministry and within the Standing Conference of *Länder* Ministers to circumvent the high potential conflict inherent in the establishment of the Bachelor degree as regular labour market entry for university students and also prevented serious resistance against the replacement of the traditional *Fachhochschul* programmes by a shorter Bachelor degree. Whereas this aspect of the reform was generally supported by the rectors' conference and the national employers associations, student organisations and a wide range of disciplinary as well as professional organisations were strongly opposed. This resistance was however not voiced at the time that the decisive regulations which legally defined the Bachelor degree as "qualifying for the labour market" were passed. When it gradually became clear that the transition to the Bachelor-Masters structure was unavoidable, the regulation was already too deeply embedded in the system to be easily changed; it had already been replicated in *Länder* laws as well as accreditation criteria. Deferral or evasion of implementation was nearly the only way to resist at this point in time. This explains the contrast between a far-reaching regulatory framework and the comparatively poor degree of implementation until 2004. It needs to be stressed that the incremental approach was not so much a political strategy of the Federal Ministry but rather a forced result of federalism and the overall political situation.

Policy formulation in this dimension in France was marked by a clear sequence: in 1999, the creation of the *licence professionelle* as an immediate translation of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations into national policies, followed in 2002 by the new impetus to reform the general *licence*. The *licence professionelle* was clearly a ministerial initiative of the Allègre Cabinet; it was even created against the initial resistance of employers and professional associations

who later actively took part in the implementation. Student and staff unions were also initially sceptical, but soon came to see the new degree as an additional opportunity for the "democratisation" of educational opportunities and therefore supported it. Both universities and IUTs backed the *licence professionelle*, but in the case of the IUTs this was linked to the self-interest to extend their qualifications to level SE+3. Overall, the ministry responsible for HE was clearly the key actor that shaped the design of the *licence professionelle*, but the small scale of the project goes back to the fact that the ministry depended on the other actors for implementation. The curricular reform efforts to increase the labour-market relevance of the general *licence* were also initiated by the ministry responsible for HE. They were less controversial than the *licence professionelle* as they were part of the wider curricular reform efforts in this field, the need for which was not denied even by student and staff unions. However, as their actual implementation depended crucially on broad participation of academics at institutional level, they were particularly prone to passive resistance through simple non-engagement and therefore to a gap between national policy and actual implementation. This game was still running in autumn 2004.

The policy outcome in the Netherlands was largely determined by an agreement between universities and employers, both of which had no interest in a university Bachelor degree designed for labour market entry. On the contrary, employers in particular took a position that this was to be prevented, as the inherited task division between *hogescholen* and universities fully satisfied their needs. Universities had no interest in 'losing' students for the Masters phase. Overall, this was more important to them than using selection for the creation of educational excellence (see section 10.2.5 on 'access'). Given this consensus among the two most decisive stakeholders in the Dutch context, the ministry did not try to push through a different position although the minister responsible for HE from 1998 to 2002, Loek Hermans, had certain preferences for student selection and the creation of centres of excellence. The only ones pointing at what they saw as inconsistencies in the different conception and treatment of Bachelor degrees from *hogescholen* and universities were students and *hogescholen*, and they did not emphasise the issue. In the case of *hogescholen*, this was because their interests were only indirectly touched, and in the case of students because they also had an interest in being able to continue their studies up to the Masters level. Therefore, this issue was not subject to intense contest at national level.

In England, the Foundation degree was an initiative of the ministry responsible for HE in particular and the Labour government in general. The idea was pushed through against criticism from a number of research universities who feared an erosion of academic standards and did not want to be forced to admit Foundation degree graduates into the third year of their Honours programmes. But the university vice chancellors' conference as a whole (Universities UK) did not dissent as some of its members also had an agenda of widening access and thus saw opportunities in the programme. Similarly, the association of principals'

of HE colleges (SCOP) was very supportive of the initiative. Overall, the reach of the Foundation degree was limited by image problems, student demand, as well as the number of concrete initiatives of universities and employers/professional associations, rather than by outright resistance of certain national-level organisational actors.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. This dimension is a clear example of how nested institutions between HE and the public and private sector, as well as interwoven patterns of decision making and regulations between HE and other political fields and responsibility structures, slowed change. This was certainly the case in Germany and France. The Netherlands and England did not encounter this problem, but it was not pertinent either as the length of degrees was not adjusted (apart from the Foundation degree in England). In Germany and France these nested institutions included both informal features such as widespread views on how much time in what type of HE was needed to qualify for certain professions, and their reflection in formal entry regulations and pay scales of the public and private sectors. In Germany, a relatively large degree of formal change was brought about in the HE sector by establishing a new degree level meant to qualify for the labour market for the majority of students. But informal (paradigm) change in HE and change in the employment sector in general did not keep pace, thus limiting the reach of this formal change. In France, the nested institutions limited formal change in HE to begin with, so the policy outcome was less radical than in Germany. This assessment does not preclude further adjustments in the near future.

To sum up, the policy outcome was clearly determined by national ministries responsible for HE in France and England. In the Netherlands, the ministry accommodated the consensus between universities and employers and in Germany the outcome resulted to a great degree from the impetus of the policy process itself. Germany is not only the country with the most ambitious reform effort but also the highest implicit level of conflict, only that the conflict was never centred in a national debate at a given point in time. Although employer positions played an important role, the "professionalisation" of the Bachelor degree was not driven by them in any of the countries.

10.2.7 Funding

10.2.7.1   Mapping policy change and convergence

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING IN 1998. Scarcity of funds was a defining feature of HE systems in all four countries, but particularly prevalent in the debates in Germany, France, and England. In absolute terms, expenditure per student was

lowest in France (US$ 7,226); Germany and the UK assumed a middle position (US$ 9,481 and 9,699, respectively) and the Netherlands led the way (US$ 10,757).[363] Only France was below the OECD country mean of US$ 9,065. Relative to GDP per capita, expenditure per student reached or surpassed the OECD country mean of 44% only in the Netherlands (44%) and the UK (45%). France was again at the bottom (34%) and Germany in the middle (41%). Total expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of GDP was below the OECD country mean of 1.3% in all four countries. It was lowest in Germany (1.0%), followed by France and the UK (1.1%), and led by the Netherlands (1.2%).[364]

The majority of **funding for the teaching function of HE** came from the state in all four countries, but the funding modes were very different. Funding of HE was a national responsibility in all countries except for Germany, where the *Länder* were in charge (resulting in 16 different models within Germany).[365] In Germany and France, personnel of HEIs were directly funded by the state, whereas lump-sum budgets included personnel in the Netherlands and England. In all four countries, funding formulas included a component based on student numbers, but the weighting of that part was much higher in England and the Netherlands than in France and in most German *Länder*. The same grouping applied to **tuition fees**: They existed in England and the Netherlands and did not in France and Germany. All four countries operated national **student support** systems with different combinations of grant and loan components, but only in Germany and the Netherlands did the maximum amounts granted for students from poor families come close to the full cost of living. Overall, the countries can be grouped into two pairs that were similar in many respects, Germany and France versus the Netherlands and England.

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[363] The amounts are presented in US$ as this is OECD data.

[364] For data sources and explanations, see footnote under the table.

[365] Accordingly, judgements presented in this section refer to general trends across the majority of *Länder* but cannot do justice to developments in each single *Land*.

Table 10.15: Funding – Institutional setting in 1998

Country	Spending on HE	Funding of the teaching function	Tuition fees and student support
Germany	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita: 9,481 US$/ 41% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP: 1.0%	Funding is *Länder* responsibility. Different systems at this level. Personnel mostly directly funded by the *Länder.* Binding national framework for the determination of teaching capacity in relation to personnel (KapVo). Some *Länder* have components in funding formula based on student numbers, some also work with contracts.	No tuition fees. Means-tested (on parental income) national student support system with a grant and a loan component, maximum nearly covers full cost of living (BAföG).
Netherlands	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita: 10,757 US$/ 44% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP: 1.2%	Public funding according to a partly performance-based formula with a significant 'money follows the student'-component, based on new entrants and graduates in universities and graduates and time to degree in *hogescholen.*	Tuition fees of €1,248 per student and academic year in 1998/99. National student support system composed of a basic loan for all that was converted into a grant in case of acceptable performance, a means-tested (on parental income) supplementary grant and an additional voluntary loan.
France	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita: 7,226 US$/34% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP: 1.1%	Funding of universities, public engineering schools and IUTs is responsibility of nation ministry responsible for HE. Personnel directly funded by the state. Operating budget determined partly through an input-oriented formula mainly based on student numbers, partly through contract policy.	No tuition fees, except for some private *grandes écoles.* Means-tested (based on parental income) national student support system, not exceeding a grant of 245€ per month. No loans. Some additional grants for talented students.

Country	Spending on HE	Funding of the teaching function	Tuition fees and student support
England	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita (UK): 9,299 US$/ 45% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP (UK): 1.1%	Funding of English HEIs through HEFCE. Funding of universities FE colleges providing HE through a block grant that is largely formula-based (including student numbers, subject-student- and institution-related factors). HEFCE contracts with individual institutions specify targets for student numbers and set upper limits.	Since 1998-99, means-tested upfront undergraduate tuition fees (£1,000), combined with interest-free loan scheme for students from poor parents. Variable postgraduate (and undergraduate part-time) tuition fees, no upper limit (*de facto* ca. 3,000£). Full-cost fees for non-EU overseas students. Since 1998-99, gradual abolition of maintenance grant, replacement by pure income-contingent interest-free loan scheme by 1999-2000.

Source: OECD (2001:67/68/82)

POLICY CHANGE UNTIL 2004. Regarding **spending on HE,** the newest available numbers from the OECD (2005) are for 2002, so a comparison across the full period until 2004 cannot be drawn. Between 1998 and 2002, expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of GDP changed only in the Netherlands, where it increased from 1.2 to 1.3%. Since the OECD mean also increased from 1.3. to 1.4% in that period, this means that most countries fell further behind. Expenditure per student increased in all countries (see table), but remained below the OECD mean (now US$ 10,655) in France. Expenditure per student relative to GDP remained unchanged in all countries except for the UK, where it fell from 45% to 41%. On the whole, the funding level of HE did not change significantly in the period. The English government made significant funds available for HE under the increasing and widening participation agenda, but that was not yet evident in the UK numbers of 2002.

In the context of the transition to two-cycle degree structures, adaptations of **funding of the teaching function** only took place in Germany and the Netherlands. They proved much less complicated in the Netherlands than in Germany. The per-student component in the Dutch formula for university funding was divided between the Bachelor and the Masters phase in a 'neutral' way, so that universities received a premium for Bachelor as well as Masters

students and graduates. There was no need to adjust the funding formula for *hogescholen* as public funding of their Masters programmes remained the exception. In Germany, where the main part of funding was distributed through direct payment of personnel salaries and teaching capacities were determined according to a national framework regulating subject-specific teacher-student ratios (KapVo), funding proved more difficult to adjust. Teacher-student ratios and implied capacities for the Bachelor and Masters phases had to be negotiated anew. There was a tendency to limit capacities for the Masters level to compensate for the increased length of programmes and to support curricular reform aims in the Bachelor phase by improved teacher-student ratios. The variable length of programmes further complicated the picture. At the same time, these difficulties increased pressure towards a more fundamental reform of the KapVo giving HEIs more leeway in local capacity planning. In France, a general reform of public sector funding was underway in the period (LOLF), though independent of LMD.

With respect to **tuition fees and student support** changes in the context of national adaptations of degree structures also occurred only in Germany and the Netherlands. In Germany, tuition fees were allowed and introduced by some *Länder* for 'non-consecutive' and 'experience-related' Masters programmes (*Weiterbildungsmaster*). A political debate on the differentiation of tuition fees was started in the Netherlands, and focused particularly on '*top Masters*' programmes as universities hoped to raise additional funds for the creation of excellent study conditions. The student support systems in Germany and the Netherlands were adjusted to the transition, but in both countries they were still confined to students below 30 years, thus only partially supporting the lifelong-learning agenda. A range of other changes occurred in this dimension in Germany, but independent of the changes in degree structures. Most notably, in early 2005 the constitutional court decided that the national government was not allowed to forbid the *Länder* to charge tuition fees (see Table 10.16). No major changes occurred in this dimension in France. The English system of tuition fees and student support also underwent profound changes in the period, though completely unrelated to the Bologna process. A 'graduate contribution scheme' was passed in the summer of 2004 to become effective from the academic year 2006/07 onwards. Upfront undergraduate tuition fees were abolished at the same time that that differential 'graduate contributions' were introduced of up to £3,000 per year. These were to be paid through an income-contingent loan system. Support grants for students from low-income families were reintroduced, effective from the academic year 2004/05 onwards.

Overall, the degree of change in this dimension (always in the context of national adaptations of degree structures) was most systematic and pronounced in the Netherlands, followed by Germany, France, and England, respectively.

Table 10.16: Funding – Policy change until 2004[a]

Country	Spending on HE	Funding of the teaching function	Tuition fees and student support
Germany (2nd) (ML)	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita: 10999 US$/ 41% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP: 1.1% (ML)	Incremental and different adjustments of KapVo at *Länder* level to account for Bachelor and Masters. Tendency to limit capacities for Masters level ('quotas') to compensate for increased length of programmes. Pressure towards more fundamental reform giving HEIs more leeway in local capacity planning. (ML)	Fees for 'experience-related' and 'non-consecutive' Masters programmes allowed by Federal HE Framework Act and introduced by several *Länder* (HM) BAföG reform in 1998 introducing student support for 'consecutive' Masters programmes, in 2001 to include any Masters programmes if student is below age of 30 (ML) Fees for students significantly exceeding regular time to degree introduced by several *Länder* (HM*) Tuition fees for first degree forbidden by national HE framework act 2002, allowed by constitutional court decision, starting from academic year 2005/06 (H*) BAföG reform 2001 broadens student support scheme by lowering eligibility barriers (HM*)

[a] *excluding implementation policy. Source: OECD (2005). This is the newest data available and is for 2002. Reports results from tables B.1.1., B.1.2. and B.2.1c. Expenditure per student is adjusted to 1998 prices using the GDP price deflator.*

Country	Spending on HE	Funding of the teaching function	Tuition fees and student support
Netherlands (1st) (HM)	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita: 13,101 US$/44% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP: 1.3% (ML)	Funding formula for universities adjusted in a 'neutral' way to account for both Bachelor and Masters graduates, but more fundamental review to integrate university and *hogeschool* funding debated (H) Some additional funding for research Masters programmes and, in individual cases, Masters programmes from *hogescholen*. (H)	No change of tuition fees in addition to incremental increases, but differential fees for Masters phase debated. (ML) 'Neutral' adjustment of student support scheme to allow for interruption of studies between Bachelor and Masters phase, but only up to age of 30 (H)
France (3rd) (L)	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita: 9,276 US$/ 34% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP: 1.1% (ML)	No adjustment in context of LMD (L) General reform of public sector funding (not only HE) underway (LOLF) (HM*)	No adjustment in context of LMD (L)

Country	Spending on HE	Funding of the teaching function	Tuition fees and student support
England (4th) (L)/(H*)	Expenditure per student/relative to GDP per capita (UK): 11,822 US$/ 41% Expenditure on tertiary education (type A+B) as % of GDP (UK): 1.1% (ML*)	Some technical adjustment of HEFCE teaching funding model as of academic year 2004/05, among others to better support the widening-participation agenda (ML*) Significant increase of funding for teaching, both total and per student (H*) (does not (yet) show in OECD data).	New 'graduate contribution scheme' passed, abolishing upfront undergraduate tuition fees but allowing for contributions of up to £3,000 per year, paid through an income-contingent loan system, effective from academic year 2006/07 onwards (H*) Support grant for students from low-income families reintroduced, effective from 2004/05 onwards (HM*)

CONVERGENCE. The introduction of two-cycle degree structures clearly did not contribute to the convergence of the four HE systems with respect to funding. Scarcity of funds was still common for HEIs across all four countries in 2002 just as it was in 1998. The English government was the only one that significantly reversed the trend and increased both funding for HE and funding per student. Adjustments in the context of adaptations of degree structures took place only in Germany and the Netherlands. In autumn 2004, the funding models for HE still differed profoundly between the four countries, and Germany and France versus the Netherlands and England could still be broadly classified into two groups. With respect to student fees, the ground was prepared for changes in all countries except for France, but this was indirectly linked only to changes in degree structures in Germany and the Netherlands and did not lead to convergence: England prepared for the move from standardised to differential fees and an income-contingent loan system, in Germany the introduction of fees was legalised and in the Netherlands the introduction of differential fees and vouchers was debated.

10.2.7.2   Causal reconstruction

This section concentrates on explaining why the introduction of two-cycle degree structures only led to change in the funding and tuition and student support systems of Germany and the Netherlands, and why adaptations were so different. Actor preferences for and perceptions of change and the dynamics of the policy formulation process, as well as formal and informal features of the inherited systems all contributed to this outcome.

ACTOR PREFERENCES. In all three countries that made the transition to two-cycle degree structures, HEIs called for additional funds for the cost of transition. In the Netherlands, *hogescholen* also had an interest in getting additional public funding for the Masters programmes that they were now allowed to offer, and universities hoped for additional funding for the two-year Masters programmes which they intended to introduce. In Germany and France, calls for additional funding of HEIs were mostly linked to the far-reaching curricular reform aims, including teaching quality improvements aimed for in the context of the transition. HEIs argued that these aims could not be reached without additional funding for intensified student guidance and better teacher-student ratios. In all three countries, governments intended to implement the reforms without incurring additional costs. England was the only country where the ministerial interest in structural reform—in this case in pushing the introduction of Foundation degrees—was backed up by additional funds, which were channelled through the funding council to those HEIs that offered the new programmes.

Given that the inherited university funding model in the Netherlands had a strong per-student component based only on graduates from the traditional programmes, it was undisputed between universities and the ministry responsible for HE that a 'neutral' adjustment was called for to account for both Bachelor and Masters students. Dividing the resources between the three-year Bachelor and the mostly one-year Masters programmes then largely amounted to a technical question that was by and large unproblematic. In Germany these adjustments proved much more complicated for several reasons: first, the decision that *Fachhochschulen* and universities would equally be allowed to offer Bachelor and Masters programmes, that total programme length up to the Masters level would be increased to five years, and that the Bachelor degree had to 'qualify for a profession', were taken without discussing the funding implications. Universities took it for granted that the curricular reform aims could only be reached based on better teacher-student ratios. They tried to use the necessary adjustments of the KapVo to negotiate better teacher-student ratios, particularly for the Bachelor phase. This would have implied additional personnel costs however. The resulting problems emerged only afterwards when it became clear that the *Länder* were unable or unwilling to provide additional funds. The reform decisions implied competing demands on the same resources. Moreover, systems in sixteen *Länder* had to adjust.

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Regarding tuition fees and student support systems, the dominant political preference in the Netherlands was not to create any disincentives against the new degrees. In line with these aims, a neutral adjustment of the student support system was brought about and the tendencies towards differential fees in the Masters phase were suppressed until autumn 2004. In Germany, preferences of state actors were less uniform. The political interest to render the new degrees attractive competed with the struggle for cost containment and generation of income from tuition fees, both driven by the difficult funding situation. In this context, the traditional importance of the "first degree qualifying for a profession" as the boundary up to where student support was paid and fees were forbidden, came to play a big role: as the Bachelor degree was defined as "qualifying for a profession", all Masters degrees would have been fee-paying and no student support would have been paid for Masters students had the relevant regulations not been adjusted. This was at least partially 'buffered' in that student fees were only allowed for experience-related Masters programmes and student support extended to include Masters programmes (though not from the beginning, and only including programmes that 'build on a Bachelor degree'). In France, student fees for university studies were such a 'taboo' that their introduction in the context of the adaptation of degree structures was not even considered, even if some student unions used the rumour about such plans to generate resistance to the reforms.

ACTOR PERCEPTIONS. It is astonishing to see how different debates developed in Germany, the Netherlands, and France. In the Netherlands, it was 'natural' to discuss the possible lengthening of degree programmes hand in hand with the funding implications. It was completely clear to all participants that an increase of programme length would necessitate additional funds. As the government was not generally willing or able to provide these funds, programme length remained unchanged. In Germany, the funding implications of the increased programme length and the curricular reform ambitions were only discussed after the decision had been taken, and in France, there was virtually no discussion that the move to LMD might lengthen studies and therefore increase costs. The absence of this debate in France up to autumn 2004 is particularly astonishing: if all those students who previously left university with a *maîtrise* now complete the Masters phase, this would significantly increase the burden on universities. Only if the *licence* becomes established as a major entry point to the labour market, can this be avoided.[366] It looks as if the greater transparency of the Dutch funding model compared to the German and French models explains these differences in perception. A similar assessment holds for England, which also had a transparent funding system with a strong per-student component, and where the state

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[366] In early 2005, this did become a political issue (CPU, 2005a, 2005c).

provided additional resources for the introduction of the Foundation degree, as well as to support the increasing and widening participation agenda in general.

Regarding tuition fees and student support, in all countries that reformed their degree structures the fear that this might be used for an introduction or increase of student fees was present in the reform debates and particularly conditioned student views on the topic. In Germany, this was again linked to the perception of the reform as imposition of an 'Anglo-Saxon model'. However, only in Germany did this fear materialise in that experience-related Masters programmes became fee-paying even before the general ban on student fees was lifted. But even in Germany, the trend towards student fees was as such independent of the adaptation of degree structures and just got mixed up with it.

ACTOR CONSTELLATION AND INTERACTION. In the three countries that made the transition, there was a clear conflict between HEIs that called for additional funding and HE ministries that aimed for a 'cost-neutral' implementation of the reform. And in all three countries, governments largely resisted the pressure from institutions for additional funding. But conflict was dealt with very differently: in the Netherlands, this was done through upfront confrontation of interests and negotiation between the actors. The result was that the Dutch government made more concessions than governments in other countries, agreeing to fund *hogeschool* Masters programmes in exceptional cases and university research Masters programmes if they passed accreditation. In Germany, the conflict was dealt with through incremental decision-making and an evasion of confrontation that we already observed in the other dimensions. As a result, instead of a clear and conscious decision, concessions were unforeseen and unintended points such as capacity constraints for entry into Masters and partly even Bachelor programmes. In France, the conflict was less pronounced. The initial demands of universities for additional funding were not carried through very decidedly. The counterargument of the ministry that reduced repetition and drop-out, better coordination of programme supply, and elimination of very small DESS/DEA programmes would bring about efficiency gains, seemed to convince universities at least to some degree.

Regarding tuition fees, the debate was again most openly led in the Netherlands and focused on the introduction of differential fees for the Masters phase to support the creation of '*top Masters*' programmes. The decision was deferred however, partly due to student resistance but even more so because the majority of parliamentarians were against it, reflecting the dominance of egalitarian values in Dutch society. The political debate in Germany on the introduction of student fees was highly loaded with a conflict between the Federal and the *Länder* level on the responsibility for HE, and was as such independent from the transition to a Bachelor-Masters structure. The introduction of tuition fees for experience-related Masters programmes acted more as a neglected 'valve' in this context to allow for fees in a niche as long as they were generally forbidden, similar to the fees for students significantly exceeding *de jure* length of studies. The French discussion

on tuition fees in autumn 2003 had the character of a sham fight without empirical basis as there were no political plans for their introduction.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING. Here I have again indirectly addressed how the formal and informal features of the inherited HE system shaped the policy outcome in 2004, this paragraph serves as a summary of these results. I have explained that among the three HE systems that made the transition to a two-cycle structure, only the Dutch one had a funding system which 'facilitated' explicit adjustment to the new degree structure. Both the formal features of this system, such as a clear per-student component and lump-sum funding, and related informal features such as the high cost-awareness among actors in the Dutch HE system, all contributed to this result. The formal features of the French and German HE funding systems, such as direct funding of personnel costs by the state, blurred the funding consequences of the degree reforms, contributing to only partial and late adjustments. While the developments in the English HE sector in the period were independent from the Bologna process, the basic story is similar to the Netherlands. A relatively high degree of transparency of costs per students and associated cost awareness supported further reform of the funding model as well as the political decision to channel additional funds into HE.

10.3 Overall analysis and conclusions

Now that I have compared the course of reform along seven dimensions of the HE systems of England, Germany, the Netherlands and France, this section summarises the overall results from the comparative analysis and draws conclusions. First, I compare the overall *degree* of policy change among the four systems across all seven dimensions (section 10.3.1.1). Next, I investigate whether these changes have contributed to the convergence of systems, capturing the broad trends in the *nature* and *direction* of these changes (section 10.3.1.2). Finally, I identify the main cross-dimensional patterns regarding the causal reconstruction (section 10.3.2).

10.3.1 Policy change and convergence

10.3.1.1 *Degree of policy change*

In the previous chapter, I compared the four HE systems with respect to the relative degree of policy change along the seven dimensions between 1998 and 2004 based on a detailed analysis of a range of sub dimensions. I not only consider policy formulation along the individual dimensions, but also national implementation policies (see sections 10.2.2 and 10.2.3).

The results are discussed separately for these two aspects, before integrating them into an overall judgement. Table 10.17 gives an overview of both aspects.

Table 10.17: Overall degree of policy change until 2004

	Germany	The Netherlands	France	England
Dimensional analysis				
Institutional types	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (ML)	4t (L)/(HM*)
Degree structures	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (HM-ML)	4th (L)/(ML*)
Curricular governance	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	1st (H)	3rd (L)/(H*)
Curricula	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	1st (H)	3rd (ML)/(ML*)
Access	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (ML)	4th (L)/(HM*)
Transition to employment	1st (HM)	3rd (L)	2nd (ML)	4th (L)/(ML*)
Funding	2nd (ML)	1st (HM)	3rd (L)	4th (L)/(H*)
Overall I	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (HM-ML)	4th (L)/(HM*)
Implementation policy	3rd (ML)	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	does not apply
Overall II[a]	2nd (HM)	1st (H-HM)	2nd (HM)	3rd (L)/(HM*)

[a] *Generally, this refers to policy change in relation to adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process. For England, both policy change within and outside of the context of the Bologna process is reported, the latter denoted by an asterisk (*). The rank order is based only on policy change within the context of the Bologna process (see also methodological chapter, section 4.4.1). The summative judgement is based on equal weightings of individual dimensions. Similarly, 'Overall I' and 'Implementation policy received equal weight to arrive at 'Overall II'. The rank order does not include a judgement of whether these changes are good or bad. The information in brackets describes the degree of change in qualitative terms: (H) = high, (HM) = high to moderate, (ML)= moderate to low (L) = low.*

POLICY CHANGE ALONG THE SEVEN DIMENSIONS. From the dimensional comparison regarding policy formulation on adaptations of national degree structures along the seven dimensions, Germany comes out first in most dimensions, followed by the Netherlands, France, and England. Policy formulation along the individual dimensions was most radical in Germany in all dimensions except for funding, where the Dutch actors had the least difficulties in adjusting their system, and the ministry responsible for HE made most concessions regarding the provision of additional funds. The Netherlands holds second place in all dimensions except for funding, where it comes first, and transition to employment, where it comes last. The picture is more uneven for France, with a similarly high degree of policy change as Germany regarding

curricular governance and curricular reform; moderate change of the degree structure; little change regarding the relationship of institutional types, access to the Masters level, and transition to employment; and nearly none at all regarding its funding model. England did not adapt its degree structures except for the introduction of the Foundation degree (outside the context of the Bologna process). In the other dimensions, the changes that took place were also unrelated to Bologna, except for some movement in the dimension of curricula, namely with respect to ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. This was small however, compared to the changes in the other three countries in this dimension. If all policy change in England in this period is taken into account irrespective of the context in which it happened, the picture is very different: high degree of change in the dimensions of curricular governance and funding, high to moderate with respect to institutional types and access, and moderate to low in the remaining dimensions. Overall, policy change in English HE between 1998-2004 was high to moderate and yields a middle position among the other countries. The fact that England occupies the last place in all dimensions is thus no reflection of the general degree of change in this country, but owed to the fact that policy change in this period was not framed in the context of the Bologna process.

To sum up, if all dimensions are given equal weight, the degree of change implied in national policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures is highest in Germany, followed by the Netherlands, France, and England, respectively.

IMPLEMENTATION POLICY. However, the picture looks very different if one looks at implementation policies. In the dimensional analysis, this aspect received particular attention in section 10.2.2 on 'degree structures', and to some extent in section 10.2.3 on 'curricular governance'. It is important to include it in the overall assessment, because policy formulation in individual dimensions will only come to bear to the extent that the new degree structure is actually mainstreamed in the respective HE system. As Table 10.17 shows, national policy formulation on the actual transition to the adapted degree structures was most advanced in the Netherlands, followed by France, and then Germany. The aspect does not apply to England as there were no policies on adapting degree structures that could have been implemented.

In the Netherlands, national consensus that the entire system would make the transition to the two-cycle system emerged early on and was formalised in terms of regulation through an amendment of the National HE Act passed in autumn 2002. Formally, there was an open-ended transition period (subject to further notice by the ministry), but most institutions did not make use of it as they were eager to implement the reform. By the start of the academic year 2002/03, the large majority of first-year students started in the new degree structure as most HEIs had begun to convert to the new system, many even prior to the regulation. In France, up until autumn 2004, no national law yet enforced the transition by a certain point in time; the relevant decrees—in 1999 and 2002—were passed in

addition to the existing regulation, not replacing it. It was left up to universities to opt for the new degree structure; only then would the new regulation be applied. Clear guidance on implementation was provided by the ministry however, and was taking place in four waves in the context of the contract policy; the first cohort of universities starting by the academic year 2003/04, and the last one by 2006/07. In practice, nearly all universities whose turn it was according to the cohort did indeed opt for the new structure. Some even did so ahead of time, the first ones making the transition by the start of the academic year 2002/03. Therefore, it is fair to speak of a national consensus for transition in the French HE system as well—with the exception of the *grandes écoles* which by and large did not take part in the reform. It should also be added that the ministry did not enforce the transition in those subject areas where this proved problematic, such as in medical fields or some niche areas in the arts. In Germany, the picture is not as clear. Formally, even by autumn 2004, there was no explicit national decision in favour of the full transition to Bachelor and Masters programmes, either by the federal ministry responsible for HE or by agreement of *Länder* ministers or the national rectors' conference. The competence of the federal ministry for taking such a decision would have been disputed in any case. The statement of intent by the Standing Conference of *Länder* Ministers in this regard was sufficiently vague. And only a few *Länder* had prepared or passed laws stipulating the transition of programmes in most disciplines. In Winter semester 2004/05, 26% of total programme supply at German HEIs was of the Bachelor/Masters type (counting Bachelor and Masters programmes separately), but only 8% of students were enrolled in these programmes (HRK, 2005; *Statistisches Bundesamt*, 2006). Nevertheless, in Germany, too, it was taken for granted by most actors that, with few exceptions, the transition to the two-cycle degree structure would have taken place by 2010 at the latest; and most *Länder* were pursing this aim with a range of policy instruments such as management by contracts and the like.

OVERALL POLICY CHANGE. If policy formulation along the seven dimensions and implementation policy are combined into a single overall measure, the Netherlands comes out as the country with the highest degree of policy change in the context of the Bologna process; Germany and France share a middle position, and England comes last. The Netherlands did not opt for the most far-reaching policies in each of the dimensions, but the policies were built on an early consensus that these changes would also be implemented, because the transition to the new degree structures was already agreed among all major actors. The middle position of Germany and France is the result of two quite different pictures. In France, moderate policy change as such went hand in hand with fairly decisive implementation policies, even if they left aside an entire institutional type in the *grandes écoles*. In Germany, the two aspects fell apart most extremely: the radical changes formulated nationally in each single dimension were only possible *because* decision-making on the systematic implementation of the new system was deferred. This resulted in a stark contrast between radical

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policy formulation *per se* and weak capacity of the system to implement these changes.

Which approach will lead to more institutional change in the long run is contingent on future developments in the four HE systems after autumn 2004, but so far the Dutch approach has definitely led to the quickest and most predictable changes. Given the feedback loops from implementation into policy formulation that have been described in the theoretical chapter and the partial deferral of policy formulation to the implementation phase described for all countries (most notably for Germany and France), even national policy formulation was by no means complete by autumn 2004, and further adjustments and readjustments can be expected in all countries. The analysis reported here still allows for a spotlight on the adaptation of national degree structures in the four HE systems and the particularities and interaction of different dimensions of the policy processes that shape them.

FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL CHANGE. Linking this finding to North's distinction of formal and informal change, the observed gap between policy formulation along the seven dimensions *per se* and decision-making on implementation can be seen as a reflection of incongruence between the adjustment of formal and informal constraints: to the extent that policy formulation resulted in new regulation, it brought about formal change. In so far as this new regulation was backed up by changed mental maps—attitudes, paradigms, values—of the actors in national HE, it was accompanied by informal change at this level. But as we have seen, the two have not been fully congruent and none of the HE systems has yet reached a 'new equilibrium'. Given the more or less participative nature of policy formulation in all four systems, where informal change did not hold pace with formal change, this is to some extent reflected in the slow decision-making on implementation (and ultimately implementation itself, but the latter is beyond the scope of this study).

Seen through this lens, congruence between formal and informal change in the context of the Bologna process was highest in England, where both were low. In the Netherlands, the congruence between formal and informal change was also relatively high, but because both were quite high. In France, formal and informal change fell to some degree apart, resulting in some deferral of implementation; and in Germany the gap between both was highest. Accordingly, the strongest mutual adjustment processes between formal and informal constraints can still be expected in Germany, followed by France, the Netherlands, and England, respectively.

10.3.1.2   Convergence

Building upon the detailed dimensional analysis of convergence in section 10.2, I now turn to a summative assessment. By doing so, I seek to answer the third research question of this study of whether the adaptations of national degree

structures in the context of the Bologna process contributed to the convergence of the HE systems studied. I will return to the second research question in section 10.3.2, where I undertake a summative assessment of the various explanatory factors across dimensions.

Table 10.18 reiterates key features of convergence and divergence among the HE systems of England, the Netherlands, France, and Germany for each of the seven institutional dimensions. In assessing convergence, all relevant changes in the defined dimensions are equally taken into account, including those independent from adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process, as in the English case. This is necessary because convergence is a relational concept that occurs *between* HE systems, and therefore all changes in any of the systems affect it. Ideally, this procedure should allow us to identify the extent to which the adaptations of degree structures have contributed to the convergence or divergence of HE systems.

Table 10.18: Convergence – Overall picture

Dimension	Convergence/Divergence
Institutional types	Binary/unitary system: weak convergence. G, NL, F move towards E, which moves on further.
	Degree types, levels and titles in relation to institutional types: weak convergence towards unification. G, NL, F move towards E.
	Cooperation/permeability: no convergence, parallel trend.
Degree structure	Degree levels: Convergence towards two-cycle degree structures, but first '*caesura*' after 2 years in G, F, E. G, NL, F move towards E. All HE systems become more similar except for G and NL, which make a parallel movement towards two-cycle degree structures.
	Degree length: two groups emerge: G+F: 3+2, NL+E: 3+1 (4 (+1) in *hogescholen*)
	Degree types: convergence of G+NL towards F with respect to distinction of research versus professional Masters programmes, but meaning differs. In addition, other differing degree types.
	Degree titles: convergence of G, NL, and E towards Anglo-Saxon terminology, but meaning differs.
Curricular governance	Quality assurance systems: G, NL, F convergence to programme accreditation (state *habilitation* in France), but not England. Nevertheless, convergence towards basing quality assurance on external peer review, and towards (at least formal) curricular autonomy of institutions.
	Curricular diversity: convergence towards medium degree.
	National capacity planning: no convergence.

Dimension	Convergence/Divergence
Curricula	Internal structure of studies: no convergence. ECTS and modularisation: formal convergence but different national interpretations. Curricular models: no convergence. Two groups: F+NL, G+E *De jure* and *de facto* length of studies: convergence towards accordance of the two.
Access	Secondary schooling, length: convergence of G towards F, E+NL (exception of schooling preparing for *hogescholen*) Secondary schooling, curricular models: no convergence. Increasing participation: convergence towards this agenda, but not to similar participation rates. Access to HE: G (+NL) converge towards E, F does not move. Access to Masters: G (+NL) convergence towards E, F formally does not move.
Transition to employment	Bachelor degree as entry point to labour market: G (and weakly NL+F) converge towards E. Formal possibility in all systems. Degree of regulation linking HE to public service: no convergence. Remains high in G+F and low in NL+E.
Funding	Context of austerity: Unchanged, except for slight improvements in funding for teaching in England. Funding of the teaching function: no convergence. Tuition and student support: no convergence, except regarding debates in NL, E (+G).

In light of the multi-faceted picture drawn in Table 10.18, a stylised overall trend can be identified: the German, Dutch and French HE systems—albeit weakly—all moved in the direction of the English system. This movement was more pronounced in Germany than in the Netherlands and France and concentrated in the dimensions of institutional types, degree structure (levels and titles), access and transition to employment. A notable exception is curricular governance, where Germany, the Netherlands, and France approached a 'programme accreditation model', while the English audit system did not join this trend. Total degree length up to the Masters level is another exception. In this regard, Germany converged towards France, while England and the Netherlands remained largely unchanged, so that a five-year and a four-year model came to exist side by side. With respect to degree types, Germany and the Netherlands converged towards the French distinction of research and professional Masters programmes, while and England did not adapt its—similar, but not identical—traditional distinction between research and taught degrees. Funding is the only dimension where no convergence can be identified whatsoever until autumn 2004. Nevertheless, if one includes the political debates, a trend towards

(increasing and differential) fees can be identified across the Netherlands, England, and more weakly Germany.

An interesting finding is that in some respects, features of HE systems converge formally, but are associated with different national meanings across countries. An example of a situation where formal and informal convergence is incongruent is the trend towards Anglo-Saxon degree titles. Even using the same words they nevertheless remain loaded with different national connotations, which remain largely inaccessible to the non-national observer. Another example is the distinction between research and professional Masters degrees which can, in one way or the other, be found in all four HE systems but which is based on very different criteria and background. A similar point has also been made by Crozier, Curvale, and Hénard (2005) and by the international commission that reviewed the Dutch degree titles (Report Committee Review Degrees, 2005). The opposite case—of informal convergence without formal convergence—can also be found. An example is the similarities between the German introduction of accreditation and the French reforms of the *habilitation* system. Although the French formally did not introduce accreditation, they implemented several reforms that the Germans achieved through the introduction of accreditation, such as the increase of curricular diversity and stronger reliance on academic peer-review. In this case, one has to look behind the scenes to observe convergence that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Finally, there are many examples of similar driving forces without convergence of policy outputs. Similar problems and debates can be observed across countries, but the solutions found differ.[367] Often, the same problems are discussed in very different contexts. An example is the similarity between the Foundation degree debate in England, the introduction of the *licence professionelle* in France, and the Bachelor degree in Germany. Another example is the debate about institutional audit versus subject review in England, and between institutional versus programme accreditation in Germany and recently also the Netherlands.[368]

Selected features of the HE systems either remained constant, moved in parallel, or underwent different developments which did not significantly change their proximity. However, I found hardly any evidence that the adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process contributed to an overall *divergence* of national systems. A different picture presents itself with

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[367] An interesting position regarding this point is argued by Ravinet (2005b). While it is often taken for granted that similar problems across Europe provided the trigger for creating the Bologna process as a joint framework for treating these problems and a lever for reform, based on detailed empirical analysis she demonstrates that there was no shared reform agenda between France, Germany, Italy, and England *prior* to the Sorbonne declaration.

[368] In the latest amendment of the Dutch HE Act passed in 2005, the partial move to institutional and or departmental accreditation is foreseen as of 2010.

respect to divergence *within* HE systems: Germany and France particularly became more diverse in this respect; partly due to the parallel existence of different degree structures in the transition phase, but also due to the increased curricular autonomy of institutions. This is a different issue worth a study of its own.

Of course, pair-wise convergence between some of the systems implied divergence between others. An example is the clear trend towards broadening of undergraduate education in the Netherlands and France not shared in Germany and only partly in England. It can be argued that this further separated the Dutch and French systems from the German—and partly also the English—ones. Similarly, the tighter stance regarding the labour-market relevance of the first degree and access to the Masters level in Germany as compared to France and the Netherlands can be argued to have distanced the systems from each other. However, I hold that overall, the fact that all systems had a first degree established by autumn 2004 outweighs these partially diverging trends, and that much is still in flux and is likely to lead to further convergence.

By conclusion, the HE systems in England, France, the Netherlands, and Germany converged weakly between 1998 and 2004. But to what degree was this convergence driven by the adaptation of national degree structures? Empirically, nearly all important changes in the seven dimensions occurred in the context of the Bologna process, with the exception of those in England. I have argued before that this does not necessarily mean that they were *caused* by the adaptation of degree structures. As we have seen, this reform often served to enable, sustain, and amplify developments driven by deeper underlying forces or particular interests. Sometimes it also simply provided a mental frame for developments that were as such unrelated to degree structures. But in all these functions, the adaptation of degree structures did contribute to the convergence of the four HE systems.

The English case complicates this picture. While the English HE system did undergo a number of reforms in some of the dimensions of my comparative framework, these reforms were not conceptualised in the context of the Bologna process. Some negatively affected the overall degree of convergence, and some had a positive effect. The clearest example for the former is the introduction of the Foundation degree which strengthened a '*caesura*' after two-years of HE against the common trend towards a first degree after three years. An example of the latter is the English effort at developing a 'national qualifications framework'.
But the English case also helps to put some continental European developments in perspective. In fact, a lot of change easily interpreted as part of 'Bologna' in continental Europe is actually driven by deeper underlying challenges such as the move to the knowledge society, the according massification of education systems, and international competition (see next section), that are shared across HE systems.

To conclude, indeed a more differentiated picture emerges which somewhat puts the role of the Bologna process in perspective. It becomes clear that developments initiated by the Bologna process and those independent of it fall into the same corridor of HE reform across the countries studied. The role of Bologna appears to have been to sustain, frame, and amplify, but not to generate this development.

10.3.2 Causal reconstruction

Given the complexity of the policy process and the interrelation of the different actor-related concepts that were clarified in the detailed dimensional analysis in section 10.2, it would not be fruitful to try to separate out their relative importance in determining the overall policy outcome or seek mono-causal explanations. This section instead seeks to identify some overarching patterns from the dimensional analysis and discuss factors that consistently emerged as particularly important. Towards this end, actor capabilities—discussed upfront in section 10.1—are also taken up once more (section 10.3.2.3).

10.3.2.1 Actor preferences

A first overall finding is that despite the multitude of individual actor preferences and motivations for engaging in or resisting adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process, it was indeed possible to identify predominant preferences in each country driven by deeper underlying societal challenges affecting the HE sector and conditioned by the different institutional settings. The second finding is that although the weighting of these challenges differed between countries, they boil down to a handful of ultimate concerns.

When recapitulating the dominant preferences for change in the seven institutional dimensions across the HE systems, four underlying driving forces could be identified that surfaced repeatedly throughout the analysis; namely the *massification of HE systems*, the *challenges posed by the knowledge economy*, the *concern for international competitiveness*, and the *desire for international readability or comparability*.

In terms of the dimensions of the theoretical framework, massification can be associated with the dimension of 'access' and knowledge society with 'transition to employment', while international competitiveness and readability/comparability refer to the two faces of internationalisation—the competitive versus the cooperative—identified by authors such as Scott (1998), Van der Wende (2001), and Van Vught, Van der Wende and Westerheijden

(2002).[369] With respect to the adaptation of national degree structures, competitive and cooperative motivations partly overlap, because an internationally readable degree structure serves to simultaneously foster international co-operation through student exchange and render one's own HE system more attractive for international students to compete with other attractive locations. Massification and the knowledge economy are also interrelated in that the knowledge economy demands that a higher percentage of the population participates in HE, and thereby contributes to the massification of HE systems. The adaptations of degree structures are an answer to both, in that they allow for the accommodation of larger amounts of students in the first cycle at moderate costs while lending themselves to the supply of life-long learning opportunities in both the first and the second cycles. This leads us to the context of austerity, which acted as an important side condition for the reforms across HE systems.[370]

If one looks closely at the individual countries, it becomes clear that the strength and direction of these driving forces differed. The German and French HE systems are similar in that both had enormous unsolved problems with massification which underlie the dominant preferences for adapting institutional types, degree structures, curricula, access, and the transition to employment. On a deeper level, even the adjustments of curricular governance systems towards more curricular diversity and institutional autonomy can be seen as ultimately driven by massification. As some authors argue, it is the massive growth of HE systems in the last decades that demanded more decentralised steering modes (Müller-Böling, 2000: 27-28; Musselin, 2003, 2004). The international concerns were real in these two countries, but at the same time they were used as a lever for solving massive internal problems. International concerns were also partly based on national problems, so tackling the latter would also improve international competitiveness and compatibility. Notably, overcrowded HE systems have difficulties in attracting international students—particularly from systems without these problems—if they do not manage to organise niche areas with better teacher-student ratios and learning conditions.

In the Netherlands, international concerns were much more directly at the centre of attention from the beginning. During the reform process the country was less diverted from the goal of improving international competitiveness and readability than Germany and France. One explanation is that the Netherlands

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[369] I admit that national and international dimensions are impossible to fully disentangle: massification and the move towards the knowledge society are trends shared by many countries and international competitiveness has become a major national concern.

[370] I am hesitant to say it was a driving force as in none of the observed countries were adaptations of degree structures introduced on the basis of a cost-cutting agenda. However, being able to extend access and/or improve graduate rates without having to increase funding was a consideration of governments in Germany and France, and increasing and widening participation at moderate cost played a role in the introduction of the Foundation degree in England.

solved the massification problem earlier by directing the majority of students into the *hogeschool* sector, as well as by earlier curricular reforms in universities. Reforms in the Netherlands were therefore less loaded with national reform pressure than in Germany and France. The relatively small size of the Dutch HE system regarding both numbers of students and HEIs is another possible factor explaining the dominance of international concerns not only as trigger for the reforms, but also as a continued driver throughout the reform process.

The comparison draws attention to the fact that the adaptations of national degree structures in Germany and France can be seen as a substitute for more fundamental reforms to redress the balance between the two major institutional types—universities and *Fachhochschulen* in Germany; universities and *grandes écoles* in France—both in terms of student numbers and the distribution of the research function and the preparation for professional life outside of HE. By increasing the professional orientation of university education and creating realistic job opportunities after a shorter study time, these countries sought to integrate the functions of both institutional types into an enlarged university sector. This also clarifies why a real integration of degree structures between the two institutional types was not intended in the Netherlands. Here, the *hogeschool* sector already fulfilled the functions that needed to be created in the university sectors of France and Germany. These differences between Germany and France on the one hand and the Netherlands on the other are even more remarkable if one considers that the entry rate into HE in 1998 was 52% in the Netherlands, , while only 37% in France and 28% in Germany (OECD 2000, see section 10.2.5).[371]

The Dutch situation did however, imply another problem that only became visible in the course of the reform process; the low research intensity of Dutch *hogescholen* led to difficulties regarding their international comparability with their 'counterparts' in other European HE systems (see also Report Committee Review Degrees 2005).

Finally, England deserves special attention. Here, massification was also an important driving force—the entry rate into HE was 48% in 1998—but as the Bachelor (i.e., the *Honours*) degree already existed, a solution was sought at another level; the popularisation of a new 'sub-degree level' Foundation degree after only two years of studies. Concern with international competitiveness was very important for English universities, but unlike in the other three HE systems,

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[371] These numbers only concern ISCED level 5, type A. To prevent a biased impression, it needs to be kept in mind that the numbers including ISCED level type B, i.e., short HE programmes of less than three years' length, are 53% in the Netherlands, 67% in France, and 42% in Germany; and that different from Germany, where ISCED level 5 type B students were largely catered for through the dual training system and thus outside of the German HE sector, in France this was done in the HE system and largely within universities (through the two-year technical programmes offered by the IUTs). In other words, overall the French university system had to cope with much higher student numbers than the German and even than the Dutch one.

it acted as a trigger *against* rather than for adaptations of degree structures, notably the Masters degree (see chapter 9). This was ultimately due to two reasons: first, the coupling of international concerns with funding concerns—i.e., non-EU students had become a major source of funding for English universities—and second and related, the importance of the non-EU international context for English universities.

Based on the analysis in the preceding sections, Table 10.19 summarises the driving forces underlying the predominant preferences for change in the four HE systems.

Table 10.19: Driving forces underlying preferences for change in the seven dimensions

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Institutional types	Massification Knowledge society	- Knowledge society	Massification Knowledge society	Massification Knowledge society
Degree structures	Massification Relationship of institutional types	- -	Massification Relationship of institutional types	- -
	Curricular reform	-	Curricular reform	-
	International competitiveness International readability/ comparability	International competitiveness International readability/ comparability	International competitiveness International readability/ comparability	International competiti-veness (constraint) -
Curricular governance	Increase curricular diversity/institutional autonomy (International recognition)	- International recognition	Increase curricular diversity/institutional autonomy (International recognition)	Increase institutional autonomy -
Curricula	Massification (Opportunity for innovation)	- Opportunity for innovation	Massification (Opportunity for innovation)	- (Opportunity for innovation)
Access	Combine massification, differentiation and research excellence	Combine massification, differentiation and research excellence	Combine massification, differentiation and research excellence	Combine massification, differentiation and research excellence

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Transition to employment	Massification -	- Maintain sufficient Masters-level graduates	Massification -	Massification -
Funding	Cost-neutral reform Intransparent funding system	Cost-neutral reform -	Cost-neutral reform Intransparent funding system	Cost-neutral reform -

Note: Driving forces in brackets indicate that they were less important, but present.

10.3.2.2   Actor perceptions

Regarding actor perceptions, a consistent observation across dimensions is that perceptions of individual actors in most countries were indeed strongly influenced by shared mental maps, which were in turn strongly bound by the respective national institutional setting. In all countries, these mental maps served to legitimate and support the direction of change envisaged by the dominant—mostly state—actors. Paradoxically, while mental maps were so clearly bound by national context, it was mostly the international context that was used to legitimate the national reforms. This holds for the adaptations of degree structures in Germany, the Netherlands, and France; for the introduction of accreditation systems in Germany and the Netherlands and for the reform of the French *habilitation* system.

Another consistent finding is that despite their high importance for justifying national change, these perceptions of the international context were often highly selective or biased as they were not based on systematic research but on rumours or anecdotal evidence. This was the case in spite of the capacity for undertaking or commissioning research that the major actors, and certainly the state actors in these four countries, undoubtedly have and although awareness of the importance of international comparison has increased with the Bologna and Lisbon processes. For example, the unique German definition of the Bachelor degree as 'qualifying for a profession' was justified with reference to the Bologna declaration and Anglo-Saxon role models. Similarly, the Dutch decision to have the binary system reflected in the degree title nomenclature was legitimated with international customs.

Finally, what was taken for granted in a respective national context and not explicitly discussed emerged as equally important for mental maps as what was discussed. Wherever international perceptions served national interests or simply those of particular actors, they were promoted; whenever a 'blind spot' was

desirable from a national point of view or that of a particular actor, available international counter-examples were glossed over. These omissions were not necessarily committed consciously however. To give an example, while actors promoting programme accreditation systems in Germany and the Netherlands referred to international—and especially Anglo-Saxon—role models, the counter-example of the English institutional audit system was hardly discussed. In France, the degrees at Masters level were called '*master'*, but hardly anyone discussed the possibility of adding English acronyms such as "of Arts" and "of Science", and the possibility of calling the first degree *Bachelor* was completely neglected.

Regarding the role of international perceptions, England differs fundamentally from the other countries. While actors in the first three countries made extensive use of perceptions of the international context to justify national change, and these arguments proved to be forceful levers for motivating adjustments, most English actors saw developments in continental Europe as a threat. The dominant concern was to argue against adjusting to these developments. While most actors in the first three countries saw potential gains from joining hands with other European HE systems to increase the international competitiveness of the European HE area vis-à-vis the rest of the world—and particularly the United States—the dominant perception in England focused on the potential losses from this development, either through being associated with weaker HE systems or through increased competition from the rest of Europe.

Comparing Germany, the Netherlands and France more closely in this regard, Germany and the Netherlands can be grouped together as two countries in which 'the Anglo-Saxon example' functioned as dominant point of reference for the transition to two-cycle degree structures—referred to by promoters and opponents alike. In France, the wish to compete against the United States was a very present motive as well, but much less explicitly referred to in the debate. Instead, the United States was subsumed under the reference to 'other grand nations'. The European context for the entire transition to two-cycle degree structures was particularly highlighted.

10.3.2.3   Actor capabilities

Actor capabilities were dealt with upfront in section 10.1, so there is no need for another résumé across dimensions. However, the analysis pinpointed a few decisive explanatory factors for policy outputs in particular HE systems that deserve to be briefly highlighted in this section: (1) the capabilities of the national ministry responsible for HE, (2) the way of representation of HEIs, and (3) the role of employer organisations.

The single most important factor appears to be both the formal and informal capabilities of the respective ministries responsible for HE to steer the policy formulation process on adaptations of degree structures. Notably, they explain a

good extent of the gap between policy formulation along the seven dimensions and implementation policy dealt with in the preceding sections. Those countries where the national ministries responsible for HE have strong capabilities regarding degrees structures (the Netherlands and France) arrived at the most congruent relationship between the two because a good deal of potential resistance and critique could be accounted for in the policy formulation process and integrated in the policy output, leading to less problems in the implementation phase. With respect to Germany, the federal constitution of the political system and the absence of an effective national forum for joint solution-seeking largely accounts for the incongruence between quite radical policy formulation and the inability of the system to reach a clear decision on implementation. In England, where the general preferences for change in the context of the Bologna process were weak, a stronger ministerial leadership could probably have increased the ultimate degree of change by bundling the supportive forces that existed—a role assumed by the 'High Level Policy forum' and 'UK HE Europe Unit' only later in the process.

The way the interests of different institutional types were represented in the different countries emerged as another important determinant of policy outputs in the four countries. This becomes particularly clear when comparing Germany and the Netherlands. In Germany, where universities and *Fachhochschulen* were represented in a single organisation (HRK), resistance against the unification of degree titles between the two institutional types was not formally voiced at a national level (except for some individual vice chancellors, notably among the technical universities) and a common accreditation system for the two institutional types was self-evident. In the Netherlands, where universities and *hogescholen* were represented in separate organisations, the university rectors' conference (VSNU) explicitly and successfully resisted a possible unification of degree titles (i.e., the right of *hogescholen* to grant Bachelor of Arts/of Science and Master of Arts/of Science degrees) and initially also opposed the creation of a joint accreditation system. In France, the fragmented interest representation of different institutional types (and within the *grandes écoles* sector, of different types of *grandes écoles*), were obstacles to change in both sectors. This is not to say that actor capabilities were the only determinant of these policy outcomes; the different institutional starting points with respect to the distance between the two institutional types were at least as important (see section 10.2.1). Certainly in France, the fundamentally different institutional status of *grandes écoles* from universities conditioned very different policy approaches to reform each sector, and made an integrated degree structure or curricula governance system a much more distant policy aim than in Germany and the Netherlands.

Finally, the important role of employer organisations in the Netherlands compared to other countries deserves special attention. Dutch employers played a unique role in policy formulation. A similar close alliance of employers and the university rectors' conference would have been unthinkable in other countries.

The fact that the main employer organisation (VNO-NCW) supported the design of the Dutch university Bachelor degree as a 'transition degree'—i.e., not particularly geared towards qualifying for the labour market—strongly influenced the ultimate Dutch policy output, which did in fact fully reflect employer preferences. The same holds for the maintenance of the binary system.

10.3.2.4   Actor constellations and interaction

As I have shown in the comparative analysis, actor constellations and interaction did not only differ by country, but also with respect to each dimension affected by the transition to two-cycle degree structures. Regardless, I attempt to explain some general features that consistently differed between the four HE systems across all seven dimensions.

ACTOR CONSTELLATIONS. To highlight the **views of the key actors** in the four countries (see section 10.1), the position of the French and Dutch national ministries in charge of HE towards adaptations of national degree structures was explicitly supportive, while that of the KMK in Germany was hesitant. Given the diverse views of different *Länder* ministries, the diverging views of proponents and critiques often prohibited a clear stance. The position of Universities UK and the QAA was mixed. Similar to the KMK in Germany, diverging views within the membership of Universities UK prohibited a clear position of the overall institution; the QAA's overall position was rather sceptical, in spite of more positive views within.

The overall **level of conflict** was low in England, where actors largely agreed to refuse the adaptation of degree structures in the context of the Bologna process. It was medium in the Netherlands, where the main actors quickly agreed on making the transition to the Bachelor-Masters structure as such, but disagreed concerning some aspects of design and implementation. The level of conflict was high in Germany, but was not acted out. The sequencing of the policy formulation process in conjunction with the dispersion of power in the federalist system and the fuzzy and delayed reaction of reform critiques particularly from a range of academic staff unions, disciplinary, and professional organisations, contributed to this situation. Compared to the other countries, the level of conflict was also high in France, where quite fundamental opposition to important aspects of the reform process came from some important student and academic staff unions. It should be noted however, that this reform passed rather smoothly compared to other HE reforms in France, so the judgement differs depending on the reference point for comparison.

While the precise actor constellation differed from dimension to dimension, a stylised picture of the **overall actor constellation** for the four countries looks roughly as follows: the major proponents in France were the ministry and the university rectors' conference while major critique came from the academic staff unions and some student unions. A less obvious conflict existed between the

ministry and the *grandes écoles*, which were also opposed to an adaptation of their degree structures; but for reasons dealt with before, the ministry chose not to confront them and they largely evaded the reform. In the Netherlands, the major proponents were again the ministry and the university rectors' conference, but also employers and generally the *hogeschool* rectors' conference. There were no principal opponents to the process, but student organisations, and in the final phase the *hogeschool* rectors' conference, voiced the clearest critique on particular aspects of design and implementation. The only clear proponents in England— not only of adaptations of national degree structures but of a general readiness to make adjustments in the context of the Bologna process—were the secretariat of the 'UK HE Europe Unit' founded upon initiative of Universities UK in cooperation with other actors and the UK Erasmus-Socrates Council. The college principals' conference (SCOP) was also moderately positive. Other major actors, namely the ministry in charge of HE (DfES), Universities UK, and the QAA, had a mixed position that tended towards the critical. In Germany the actor constellation was the least clear, as hardly any actor formally voiced an unambiguous position in favour of large-scale adaptation of national degree structures, and most critiques voiced their concerns very late in the process. Nevertheless, the federal ministry, some *Länder* ministries, the *Wissenschaftsrat*, the secretariat of the HRK, and the employer organisation BDA can generally be seen as proponents. Major criticism came from academic staff and disciplinary and professional associations. A mixed position not fully rejecting the transition as such but stressing the risks was assumed by some *Länder* ministries, the membership base of the HRK, the national student organisation, and employers at large.

On **particular topics**, certain consistent patterns of actor constellations can be observed across HE systems. For example, competition between institutional types surfaced to different extents in the debates on degree titles and degree types in Germany, the Netherlands, and France; and on conditions for university status in England. A conflict between HEIs and the state over funding found expression in the negotiation on the length of university Masters programmes and funding for *hogeschool* Masters programmes in the Netherlands, as well as the funding for curricular reforms in Germany and France. Regarding selection upon entry to the Masters level, the typical constellation saw students clearly opposing it and the ministry and HEIs supporting it to varying degrees and more or less openly. Regarding control over curricula, actor constellations were more diverse: in Germany, major claims for influence were made by the federal versus the *Länder* ministries and the national rectors' conference, but to some extent also by a range of other actors. In France, a dispute over the level of national uniformity ignited between the ministry and university rectors' conference on the one hand and major student and staff unions on the other. In the Netherlands the issue was the degree of independence of the new national accreditation organisation from HEIs. The independence of the quality assurance system from the state was not an issue

as this had already been realised. And in England, the debate between institutional autonomy versus public accountability reflected different interests of universities and HE colleges versus the government, with the QAA as the agency caught in the middle. The conflict over the labour-market qualifying nature of the university Bachelor degree existed only in Germany, where the idea was promoted by *Länder* ministries and HRK and opposed by student unions and a range of disciplinary and professional associations. An issue that caused interesting debates in Germany and France, but not along the delineations of national actors in HE policy, was the choice of language for degree titles (see Table 10.20).

Table 10.20: Actor constellations – International comparison

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Most decisive actor	*Länder* ministries and their national conference (KMK)	National ministry	National ministry	University rectors' conference, QAA
Position of most decisive actor	Hesitant	Promoting	Promoting	Mixed
Level of conflict	High, but hidden	Medium	High	Low
Main proponents	Federal ministry, some *Länder* ministries, international cooperation agency, secretariat of rectors' conference, *Wissenschaftsrat*	Ministry, university and principally also *hogeschool* rectors' conference, employer organisations, Education Council	National ministry, university rectors' conference	UK HE Europe Unit, UK Erasmus-Socrates Council
Main critiques	Academic staff unions, a range of disciplinary and professional associations	-	Academic staff and student unions, (*grandes écoles*)	University rectors' conference, college principals' conference, national ministry, QAA

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Mixed position	(Rectors' conference), national student organisation, some *Länder* ministries.	National student organisations, *hogeschool* rectors' conference (in final phase)	Employer organisations	

ACTOR INTERACTION. The main finding from the dimensional analysis regarding actor interaction is the enormous **role of sequencing** for the policy outputs in Germany, and to a lesser extent in France and the Netherlands. I have shown how decoupling policy formulation along the seven dimensions from implementation policy allowed for the radical policy formulation in Germany regarding convergence between universities and *Fachhochschulen*, the lengthening of studies up to the Masters level, the unification of degree titles, the requirement that university Bachelor degrees have to 'qualify for a profession', and the introduction of selection upon entry to the Masters level. In the French case, the dimensional analysis demonstrated the role of sequencing for the divide between the general *licence* and the *licence professionelle* as well as the double construction of *grade* versus *diplôme national de master*. For the Netherlands it showed how the—albeit careful—convergence between universities and *hogescholen* through the 'de-institutionalisation' of degree types and the creation of a common accreditation system was facilitated by the dynamics of the reform process. This incremental development of policy formulation was only to some extent a conscious strategy chosen by the respective ministries responsible for HE. To a larger extent, it was driven by the dynamics of path dependence: unintended consequences and the opening of unforeseen opportunities in the course of the process (see chapter 2.5).

To avoid redundancies, the analysis of actor interaction in terms of Scharpf's modes of interaction—unilateral action, negotiation, majority vote and hierarchical direction (see section 3.2.5 in the theoretical chapter)—has not been performed for each dimension. The dominant **interaction modes** in the four HE systems are strongly conditioned by what has been said about actor capabilities—particularly those of the respective ministries responsible for HE—in sections 10.1 and 10.3.2.3: the Netherlands and France were the only countries whose national ministries were able to provide an effective and unchallenged forum for *negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy*. In both countries, policy formulation in these fora was followed by *hierarchical direction*—through an amendment of the HE Act in the Netherlands, and through decrees (*décrets* and *arrêtés*) and ministerial circular letters in France. This hierarchical direction was to a much lesser extent felt as such in the Netherlands than in France because the Dutch regulation was

based on a broad and far-reaching consensus between all major stakeholders, while in France hierarchical direction was a real substitute for negotiation in areas where no consensus could be reached. In Germany, both the Federal Ministry and the KMK provided fora for negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy at different points in the process. But for several reasons they were less effective in doing so than their Dutch and French counterparts: the Federal Ministry because the 'hierarchy' was unclear and subject to dispute throughout the process, the KMK because its negotiation resources were largely absorbed by the difficulty of finding an internal consensus between *Länder* ministries, and the responsibilities were less clear than in the other countries.[372] Overall, stakeholder consultation in Germany was much less systematic and extensive than in the other countries. As in the Netherlands and France, hierarchical direction was the second most important interaction mode in German policy formulation. It came in the form of KMK agreements such as the 'structural guidelines' and individual *Länder* policies. The 'directive' nature of the KMK agreements was ambiguous, as they were not legally binding, not directly for HEIs, and not even for the *Länder* who had agreed upon them. Nevertheless, they served as the most important reference point in the implementation process. In England, the situation was quite different: In light of the weak capability of the ministry to provide a forum for negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy, *unilateral action* and *negotiation in networks* were the dominant interaction modes. What I characterise as unilateral action are the uncoordinated responses of individual HEIs and different national actors up to the constitution of the 'High Level Policy Forum' (HLPF) in March 2003 and the UK HE Europe Unit and the associated European Coordination Group (ECG) in early 2004. The HLPF and the ECG then provided important fora for negotiation, but in the absence of hierarchy.

What has been said about the interaction modes has implications for the **location of political leadership** in the policy formulation process and the way it was exerted. This merits explication. Both the Dutch and the French national ministries responsible for HE exerted a strategic leadership role, but in different ways. The main policy lines emerged under the clear guidance of the ministry in the Netherlands, but were based on repeated consultation and a rather open-ended start. In France, the strategic lines were much more clearly determined from the outset by the ministry, which then used consultation as a tool to forge support. This also implied compromises regarding details, but not the principles. In sum, the French ministry exerted an even stronger strategic leadership role than the Dutch in that it often developed and set the new policy directions, while the Dutch ministry tended to bundle existing streams. In England, where the

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[372] The role of the federal ministry was particularly important in the early phase of the process when the 1998 amendment of the federal HE framework act was negotiated. The KMK 'took over' when it came to agreeing upon the details of policy formulation among the 16 *Länder* ministries.

national ministry played a more reactive role in the first few years of the process, strategic leadership was instead assumed by a range of actors from Universities UK, HEFCE, and to some extent the QAA who then created the HLPF as a forum for national consensus formation. Later, the UK HE Europe Unit—attached to Universities UK but representing a range of actor interests—also came to play an important role in facilitating the development of strategic lines. In Germany the federal system made strategic policy formulation very difficult. The locus of strategic initiative was divided between several actors whose weight shifted over time, rendering actor alliances very important.

These different approaches implied a different relationship between the **political versus the bureaucratic logic of policy formulation**. In Germany, the need to negotiate a consensus between *Länder* ministries was coordinated by the secretariat of the KMK and fostered an early dominance of the bureaucratic logic. Details of the design of the new degree structures were regulated before the great political lines had even been agreed upon. Quite differently, policy formulation in the Netherlands was dominated by political rather than bureaucratic logic and had a clear sequence: The ministry first sought to reach a consensus on the broad political lines before proceeding to the details of policy design. Even policy formulation on the details was still dominated to a large extent by political logic, due to the strong stakeholder involvement also at this level. Similar to the Netherlands, the French ministry made sure that agreement on the broad political lines was reached before proceeding to the details of policy design. However, bureaucratic logic took over later in the process; a reflection of the traditionally closer steering of French universities by the ministry and the heavy reliance on circular letters and other soft steering tools in the reform process. In England, agreement on broad political lines between the major national actors in HE policy was only formulated in the form of statements of conviction and intent coordinated by the Europe Unit.

The **forms and timing of regulation** between the four countries also differ significantly. The German situation is characterised by a combination of three layers of instruments: an early amendment of the Federal HE framework Act in 1998 again amended in 2002, to outline the principles of the new degree structures (prepared by the Federal Ministry and passed by the national parliament); several KMK agreements without formal legal significance which documented the consensus between the *Länder* on important details of policy formulation (most notably the KMK structural guidelines of 1999 and 2003); and finally a wide range of policy instruments used by the *Länder* ministries, ranging from amendments of *Länder* HE Acts through management by contracts to different forms of written and oral communication. In addition, the accreditation guidelines formulated by the *Akkreditierungsrat* in 1999 also played an important semi-regulatory role. In sum, regulation was scattered through a range of documents with different and overlapping legal status that were moreover repeatedly amended throughout the process. In the Netherlands, both the

principles and details of the reform were laid down in a single major Amendment of the National HE Act in 2002, but as the preceding consensus formation was far-reaching, the actual legal text did not play an important role in practice. Subsequent details were formulated in a further rectification law passed in winter 2004 and like in Germany, in the guidelines formulated by the national accreditation organisation in 2002. In France, the National HE Act was not adjusted and regulation was done instead through a series of ministerial decrees (passed in two waves in 1999 and 2002), but ministerial circulars and oral directions were equally important. As a result, the entire reform was built on a comparatively soft regulatory basis in France. The situation was similar to Germany in that regulation was also scattered through several documents and subject to incremental amendments—but different in that it always came from the same actor; the national ministry. The English response to the Bologna process was characterised by the absence of regulation. Movement occurred only through voluntary initiatives by HEIs and some informal consensus-formation.[373]

In terms of **dealing with resistance**, these different combinations of interaction modes implied very different approaches. The German approach led to a considerable degree of latent, unexpressed resistance which, because it did not enter the formal policy formulation process, was—and still is—played out quite erratically during the implementation process. In the Netherlands, resistance against disputed aspects of the reform was openly expressed and most of it was taken up or negotiated until a consensus was found. In areas where no consensus could be reached, the ministry ultimately determined the political direction. Whereas policy formulation in France was strongly steered by the ministry and the general level of conflict was higher than in the Netherlands, the ministry managed to some extent to account for criticism through compromises in the policy formulation process, though fundamental critiques were at times also expressed confrontationally through the media. In England, the widely-shared resistance against adaptations in the course of the Bologna process was expressed and fully accounted for in national policy. For a summary of these results, see Table 10.21.

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[373] This only holds for changes in relation to the Bologna process. Legal instruments were used for others, such as the introduction of differential fees and the establishment of an Office for Fair Access.

Table 10.21: Actor interaction – International comparison

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Interaction modes between state and stakeholders	Negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy (KMK) with some stakeholders and on some issues, hierarchical direction in spite of disagreement on others	Negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy (national ministry), followed by hierarchical direction based on broad and far-reaching consensus	Negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy (national ministry), followed by hierarchical direction based on partial consensus	Unilateral action, negotiation in networks
Nature of process I: Location of leadership	Federal system impedes strategic policy formulation, shared and shifting locus of strategic initiative and importance of alliances	Strategic lines emerging through repeated consultation, but under clear guidance of the ministry	Strategic lines set by ministry using consultation as a tool to forge support	Reactive role of ministry; strategic lines developed in consultation, coordinated and promoted by Universities UK/the Europe Unit
Nature of process II: Political vs. bureaucratic logic	Bureaucracy-driven regulation of details without agreement on broad political lines	Initial agreement on broad political lines, regulation still dominated by political rather than bureaucratic logic	Initial agreement on broad political lines, bureaucratic logic takes over when it comes to details	Agreement on broad political lines only in form of statements of intent, coordinated by Europe Unit

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
Form of regulation	National HE framework Act, KMK agreements without formal legal significance on range of details, *Länder* ministries work through HE acts, decrees and a range of other instruments	Broad lines as well as details of change in national HE act, but consensus formation more important than legal text	No adjustment of national law, regulation exclusively through decrees, communication through circulars and oral directions equally important	No regulation, movement only through voluntary initiatives by HEIs and some consensus-formation
Dealing with resistance	A lot of unexpressed resistance, which does not enter policy formulation, but is played out in implementation process	Resistance is expressed, most of it is taken up, but national ministry determines political direction	As policy formulation is strongly directed by national ministry, fundamental resistance is expressed in confrontational way through media	Resistance is expressed and fully taken up

10.3.2.5   *Formal and informal features of the institutional setting*

Across dimensions, the analysis consistently revealed that the formal and informal features of the inherited institutional setting had a strong influence on both the degree and nature of policy change until 2004. While the analysis of the policy processes leading towards this change yielded an overwhelming amount of detail that contributed to the outcomes, from a slightly more detached perspective these outcomes are indeed but 'adaptations' of the inherited institutional settings. In all three HE systems that moved to a two-cycle degree structure, the traditional divides between different institutional types were important determining and constraining factors, as were inherited relationships between HE and the employment system. The 'new' systems of curricular governance introduced in the course of reforms all strongly built on existing systems. Funding models proved especially difficult to adjust in Germany and France. Access to HE was a particularly value-loaded aspect of the reform in all four countries, and was therefore a highly political issue when designing the transition from the Bachelor to the Masters phase. And while curricular reform ambitions played an important role in the reforms, overall the dominant

curricular models in 2004 were still strongly bound by respective national traditions.

As suggested by North's framework, formal and informal features were indeed closely interwoven in all seven dimensions, and where formal features were adjusted, informal practices often continued to exert a 'retarding' pull. Examples are the formal 'de-institutionalisation' of degrees in the Netherlands which for various reasons proved difficult to use by HEIs in practice, or the continued importance of a two-year propaedeutic phase in France and Germany (DEUG, *Vordiplom*) in spite of the move to a two-cycle structure with a first degree after (a minimum of) three years.

The role of nested rules and complementary institutions (see section 2.5.1) has proven particularly relevant with respect to the transition from secondary education to HE and from HE to employment, respectively. In these two dimensions, the analysis has shown how adjustments in one sector led to tensions with the neighbouring sector. For secondary education in Germany and England, reforms took place without taking into account the effect upon the 'compatibility' arguments made in the context of the Bologna process. In Germany and France, close links between the HE and employment systems through entry regulations and pay scales rendered reform efforts difficult.

10.3.3 Conclusions

In this section I sought to explain the nature and degree of policy change and the differences between the four HE countries by means of a complex set of explanatory factors (second research question). I also sought to assess whether the adaptations of national degree structures contributed to the convergence of these systems (third research question). The answer to the third research question was relatively straightforward: there is slight convergence towards the English HE system (see section 10.3.1.2). By contrast, the answer to the second research question can only be summarised in a single sentence at a high level of abstraction: indeed all five major explanatory factors—(1) actor preferences, (2) perceptions, (3) capabilities, (4) constellations and interaction, and (5) the formal and informal features of the institutional setting—deliver partial explanations. As expected and indeed typical for the method of causal reconstruction (see section 4.1), this analysis yielded a complex and nuanced understanding of the nature and degree of policy change, differentiated by dimension. It was also possible to determine cross-dimensional patterns of effect as in section 10.3.2, though it was neither possible nor intended to determine the relative weight of these factors in causing the overall result. The analysis confirmed my approach to combine institutional and actor perspectives in a single framework. It showed both the importance of the dynamics of actor interaction in the policy formulation and the overwhelming influence of the inherited institutional frameworks on the ultimate

result. As a complement to the detailed analysis presented in this chapter, the next chapter uses the hypotheses developed in the theory chapter to focus on a subset of causal relationships implied in the theoretical framework. Different from the analysis in this chapter, the hypotheses only seek to explain the degree, not the nature of policy change.

11 Review of hypotheses

Now that I have used the theoretical framework as a heuristic to explain differences and similarities in policy change across the four HE systems, I return to the hypotheses set forth in the theoretical chapter and operationalised in the methodological chapter (see Box 11.1). By confronting the hypotheses with the empirical findings, I focus on selected theoretical aspects and check their explanatory power (see Figure 3.10 in section 3.4 for a depiction of how they relate to the theoretical framework). I thereby focus on a single aspect of my second research question (see Box 4.1), namely what explains differences in the degree of change across countries.

Box 11.1: Hypotheses (repeated)

(I)	The more the national institutional framework supports actor preferences for change…
(II)	The more actor perceptions in a HE system are influenced by the international context…
(III)	The stronger the capabilities of the national ministries responsible for HE in the respective HE system…
(IV)	The less persistent informal and formal constraints of national HE systems…

…the more policy change takes place.

To recapitulate the results from the comparative analysis in chapter 10, the overall degree of policy change in relation to adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process was highest in the Netherlands, followed by Germany and France, and lowest in England. The hypotheses will be evaluated with respect to this empirical outcome.

Additionally, two refinements will be taken into account. First, while the hypotheses will be checked against the overall degree of policy change in the context of the Bologna process, I also consider the underlying differences between policy formulation along the seven dimensions and implementation policy (see chapter 10.3.1.1). To recapitulate, policy formulation along the seven dimensions in the context of the Bologna process was most far-reaching in Germany, followed—in order of decreasing magnitude—by the Netherlands, France, and England. Decision-making on implementation was most advanced in the Netherlands, followed by France and then Germany (this aspect does not apply to England).

Second, to do justice to the special features of the English case, the evaluation of the hypotheses with respect to this country will be twofold. In addition to the policy change that occurred in the context of the Bologna process, for England I will also have another look at the hypotheses in relation to all policy change that occurred along the seven dimensions between 1998 and 2004, irrespective of whether it took place in the context of the Bologna process. From this perspective, England displays a similar overall degree of change as Germany and France, and only the Netherlands stand out.

I first reconsider each hypothesis individually (section 11.1). In the subsequent discussion of the results, I shift the level of analysis to the interplay of the four factors by country (section 11.2.1). I conclude by highlighting two policy-relevant lessons derived from this analysis (section 11.2.2).

11.1   Empirical assessment of the hypotheses

Hypothesis I: "The more the national institutional setting supports actor *preferences* for change, the more policy change takes place."

As discussed earlier, actor preferences for change are a function of the respective problem pressure emanating from the inherited institutional setting and the way it is able to deal with challenges such as massification and the knowledge society. Such pressure was clearly highest in Germany and France. Overcrowding, high drop-out rates, and long time to degree in their university sectors were only some of the symptoms. Both HE systems had experienced a history of failed attempts to solve these problems. All this led to strong actor preferences for change. In the Netherlands, national problem pressure *per se* was only low to moderate, and most preferences for change emerged from a view of the national system in international perspective (see hypothesis II). Problem pressure was moderate in England, but the resulting preferences for change were not conceptualised in the context of the Bologna process.

According to the hypothesis, policy change should have been highest in Germany and France, followed by England and finally the Netherlands. This is not the case. Particularly in the Netherlands, the degree of policy change was clearly higher than expected on the basis of the national problem pressure. Hypothesis I is thus not supported by the evidence.

It should be noted that if policy formulation only along the seven dimensions is considered, the German picture is in line with hypothesis I—strong problem pressure did translate into radical policy formulation, only that implementation policy lagged behind. In France, the national problem pressure translated into a high level of policy change only in a limited number of the dimensions—and implementation policy was generally more moderate than expected based on the high degree of problem pressure. In England, the overall degree of policy change

was generally in line with actor preferences for change, although it did not take place in the context of the Bologna process.

Hypothesis II: "The more actor *perceptions* in a HE system are influenced by the international context, the more policy change takes place."

In all four HE systems, perceptions of the international context played an important role. They were most readily used as orientation marks for adaptations of national degree structures in the case of the Netherlands, followed by Germany and France. In Germany and the Netherlands, the orientation was towards European developments as well as "Anglo-Saxon" role models. The latter were more dominant in the debate, but also more disputed in Germany as compared to the Netherlands. In France, the European context was a key argument for change used by the ministry responsible for HE, but international orientations were less pervasive among other actors. A special case are the *grandes écoles*, particularly the engineering schools, which were both very internationally-oriented and sceptical of the need for adaptations of degree structures. The English situation was also special: English actors were generally highly aware of the international context, but this did not translate into a willingness to change in the context of the Bologna process. First, because a competitive orientation towards internationalisation dominated over a cooperative orientation (see section 10.3.2.1) and second, because the willingness to accept role models from Europe was low.

According to the hypothesis, policy change should have been highest in the Netherlands and England, followed by Germany and France in that order. This is not the case. The hypothesis correctly predicts the Dutch position, but not that of the other countries. The English case shows that high perceptiveness to the international context does not automatically translate into national policy change; in the case of the Bologna process it has to go hand in hand with the belief that European cooperation is in the national interest i.e., improves the international competitive position of the country. If we introduce this criterion as a moderating variable, the hypothesised relationship is broadly supported by the empirical findings, although the predicted higher degree of policy change in Germany as compared to France is still not supported by the evidence. It only holds with respect to policy formulation along the seven dimensions, but the effect is cancelled out if implementation policy is taken into account. Overall, the findings thus provide only partial evidence for hypothesis II.

Hypothesis III: "The stronger the capabilities of the national ministry responsible for HE in the respective HE system, the more policy change takes place."

As presented more extensively in sections 10.1 and 10.3.2.3, the French ministry had the strongest capability, in terms of formal powers as well as in terms of its strategic leadership role, closely followed by the Dutch ministry, whose task to facilitate and thereby steer the national policy formulation process was undisputed. Then the English ministry came with relatively modest formal

capabilities vis-à-vis HEIs given a strong tradition of institutional autonomy, but nevertheless having considerable capacity to facilitate dialogue and bring about legal change given the majoritarian democratic system. Regarding adaptations of national degree structures, the capabilities of the English ministry were weaker than for other areas of HE policy, as degrees fell under the autonomy of institutions. The capabilities of the national ministry in Germany were weakest, due to the federalist system.

Following the hypothesis, change should be highest in France, followed by the Netherlands, England, and Germany in that order. This is different from the empirical picture in nearly all respects; hypothesis III is clearly not supported by the evidence.

There is however a tendency for those countries with stronger national ministries to have smaller 'implementation gaps', although the order is reversed between France and the Netherlands.

Hypothesis IV: "The less persistent *informal and formal constraints* of national HE systems, the more this policy change takes place."

The persistence of informal and formal constraints was highest, and similarly high, in Germany and France. In both countries, interlocking and nested regulations, which tied together HE degrees and public—in France also private-sector—careers, constituted important formal constraints; not least because overcoming them required the agreement of other ministries in addition to the ministry responsible for HE. In Germany, state degrees (*Staatsexamen*) constituted a particular challenge in this regard. The federalist structure of German HE governance also implied several layers of regulation which constituted severe formal constraints. In France, informal constraints—in the form of strong political sensitivity—rendered it politically impossible to amend the National HE Act i.e., they translated into a severe formal constraint. Concerning informal constraints, these were more 'cultural' in Germany and 'political' in France. In Germany, the perception that two-cycle degree structures were an 'Anglo-Saxon model' not in line with 'Humboldtian traditions' was an important reason for stakeholder resistance. In France, informal constraints were constituted by the combination of an egalitarian tradition with a positive attitude towards state regulation and centralism. Concretely, they implied a strong attachment to the concept of national degrees (*diplôme national*) guaranteeing uniform quality, level, and content throughout the French HE system. The strong resistance of student and staff unions to policy change in HE can also be seen as a peculiar French tradition.

Formal constraints were comparatively low in the Dutch and English HE systems, where policy was more important than regulation and changing regulation was not subject to particular obstacles. Regulatory linkages between the HE and both public and private employment were only weakly developed.

A differentiated picture emerges with respect to informal constraints: These were relatively low in the Netherlands, as evidenced by the political pragmatism

and widespread consensus-orientation characteristic of the 'polder model'. Also, underlying Humboldtian traditions had been weakened in earlier reforms and were less prevalent than in Germany. Nevertheless, informal constraints existed also in the Netherlands. An example are the egalitarian traditions of Dutch HE safeguarded by the parliament, and the gap between universities and *hogescholen* which did not only have formal, but also strong informal elements such as reputation and status. In England, the deeply-rooted tradition of university autonomy constituted an informal barrier to policy change; for change in the context of the Bologna process, the perception to be fundamentally different from continental Europe was another important informal constraint.

According to hypothesis IV, I expected policy change in the context of the Bologna process to be highest in the Netherlands, followed by both Germany and France. The hypothesised relationship is inconclusive for the English case, as the result with respect to change in the context of the Bologna process would depend on the interplay of the low formal and high informal barriers. The expectations are broadly in line with the findings: they generally reflect the ranking regarding overall policy change in the context of the Bologna process where the Netherlands come first, followed by both France and Germany and then England, in that order. Informal constraints seem to have played the more important role in the weak adaptation response to the Bologna process in England, and could not be counterbalanced by the low formal constraints. Regarding overall policy change, the results are also broadly in line with the hypothesis which predicts the highest degree of change in both the Netherlands and England, followed by both Germany and France—although change in England is slightly overestimated by this predictor. Finally, the hypothesised outcome also broadly fits the empirical ranking regarding implementation policies, where the Netherlands come first, followed by France and Germany in that order. In other words, the lower degree of formal and informal constraints in the Netherlands compared to Germany and France seems to largely explain both the higher degree of policy change and its lower 'implementation gap'. Overall, the findings thus provide a fair degree of evidence for hypothesis IV.

11.2   Discussion of results

While some of the hypothesised relationships are partially supported by the empirical findings, hypothesis IV to a large extent, the last section has made clear that not a single factor can fully explain the observed policy change. This is because these factors partly reinforce and partly offset each other. In other cases, a factor is important, but has a more complex effect than captured by the hypothesis. The 'testing' of these hypotheses is further complicated by the fact that policy change has two components which do not go hand in hand. In the following section, I take a step back from bivariate correlations and review the

explanatory factors more holistically, analysing how they work in concert for each HE system (11.2.1.). I conclude with some more general observations on their interaction (11.2.2).

11.2.1 Interplay of the explanatory factors by HE system

GERMANY. The German situation is characterised by a high degree of polarisation: on the one hand, strong national preferences for change based on acute problem pressure as well as a strong but disputed influence of the international context support a high degree of change. On the other hand, weak capabilities of the national ministry and highly persistent informal and formal constraints restrain it. Examples for the latter are widespread attachment to the 'Humboldtian' model of HE, professional entry regulations from the public and the private sector that do not match the new degree structure, and the layered legal provision that follows from the federalist structure. This situation is well reflected in the extreme gap between far-reaching policy change along the seven dimensions and hesitant national decision-making on implementation: the preferences for change fully translate into radical policy formulation justified with reference to international role models. At the same time, the weak national ministry cannot overcome the informal and formal constraints and leaves the implementation question to the *Länder* and HEIs. The *Länder* in turn do not have the capability to substitute the role of the national ministry and only agree on vague formulations regarding implementation. Interestingly, the avoidance of national-decision making on implementation does not only slow down change, it also facilitates radical policy formulation in the seven dimensions *per se* because it helps to blur the potential conflict. To sum up, the polarisation between the different causal factors translates into a divided picture of different aspects of policy change, and an intermediate overall position. When seen in conjunction, the four explanatory factors explain the degree of policy change in German HE remarkably well.

FRANCE. In France, the situation is polarised in a different way. Strong preferences for change based on severe national problem pressure and strong capabilities of the national ministry (which does however not extend to the *grandes écoles*) support change in the university sector. At the same time informal and formal constraints—such as egalitarian values deeply enshrined in French society, and as close linkages between HE degrees and employment prospects in Germany—make it difficult. The informal constraints translate into a high degree of resistance from several national actors in HE policy. International role models are an important argument of the ministry, and the belief that the transition to two-cycle degree structures (referred to as LMD in France) is needed to remain internationally competitive is an important motive for the universities to engage in the reform. But these international perceptions do not influence the logic of

national reforms very deeply. It is the confrontation of strong problem pressure in France—and consequently high preferences for change of the ministry and the representative organisation of universities—as well as strong government capabilities, faced with strong formal and informal constraints that constitutes the main polarity. The degree of policy change in France can indeed be largely explained by the interplay of these forces. In some dimensions, the national ministry manages to overcome informal barriers to change—such as the egalitarian values behind the system of national curriculum frameworks in the case of curricular governance—so that its preferences are translated into far-reaching policy formulation. In others—such as the relationship of universities and *grandes écoles*—it achieves little. In the case of the *grandes écoles*, it is also weak capabilities of the ministry that consistently translate into a low degree of change. Regarding implementation policy, the fact that the entire reform is formalised in terms of decrees rather than change of law is a tribute by the ministry to the strong formal barriers to change. The sequenced implementation policy relies on a mixture of persuasion, public pressure, and voluntarism, which was consciously chosen by the ministry to maximise the degree of informal change possible under these difficult conditions. It thus reflects both the strong capabilities of the ministry and its concessions to informal constraints. Overall, it is mainly the persistence of formal *and* informal constraints—such as the deeply enshrined gap between universities and *grandes écoles*, the attachment to egalitarian values in the university sector, and the important role of regulations in the public and private sector tying employment opportunities to degrees—that prevent more policy change in the case of France. To conclude, the four explanatory factors in concert explain a great deal of the policy change in the French HE system.

THE NETHERLANDS. In the case of the Netherlands, the fairly high adaptations brought about in most dimensions can also be explained by a combination of the four factors. The national ministry's relatively strong capabilities to steer national policy formulation, a widespread readiness to accept international role models, and a relatively low persistence of formal constraints—as exemplified by the relative ease to adapt the National HE Act and the low importance of professional entry regulations—provide very favourable conditions for policy change. But as national problem pressure is small, so are the predominant preferences for change derived from the national context. Also, informal constraints—notably the quite deeply established gap between universities and *hogescholen* as well as attachment to egalitarian values in education—show a certain degree of persistence that cannot be 'negotiated away' by the ministry. The latter two factors—low national problem pressure and persistence of informal constraints—slightly reduce the degree of possible change, but the overall degree of policy change is nevertheless quite high. The constellation also allows for a high degree of congruence between policy formulation along the seven dimensions and implementation policy. Compared with Germany and France, the Dutch situation

is much less conflict-ridden and polarised, as pressure for change and capability for change coincide to a much higher degree than in the other two countries. Overall, the four explanatory factors in conjunction capture the Dutch policy change well; although the high overall degree of policy change remains somewhat surprising given the low national problem pressure.

ENGLAND. The verdict on the English case is more nuanced. Generally speaking, moderate preferences for change derived from the national institutional context and a high influence of the international context on actor perceptions were supportive of policy change. The same holds for strong informal capabilities of the ministry to organise the national policy formulation process, low persistence of formal constraints exemplified by the low importance of legal regulation for many areas of HE, and the relative ease of changing law in a majoritarian democracy. This explains the high to moderate level of overall policy change in the English HE system quite well. However, things are different with respect to policy change in the context of the Bologna process. As England already had a two-cycle degree structure, the option to use the introduction of such structures as a lever for policy change in other dimensions was not available. Smaller adjustments of the two-cycle degree structure with a view to European compatibility, such as the length of the Masters phase, the use of modularisation and credits etc., as well as adjustments in dimensions such as curricular governance, would nevertheless have been imaginable. Here, another factor comes into play: although the general influence of the international context on actor perceptions is high, the readiness to accept European role models is low and most actors perceive the Bologna process as a threat rather than an opportunity. In a nutshell, actors do not conceptualise their preferences for change in the context of the Bologna process, and change takes place outside of that context. International perceptions thus play a fundamentally different role in English policy formulation on the Bologna process than they do in other countries. English actors generally do not use the Bologna process as a lever for national change. Rather than fostering change, the widespread Euro-scepticism among English actors in HE policy thus constitutes an informal constraint to change in the context of the Bologna process. As a compounding factor, the English ministry in charge of HE has not taken the lead in organising the response to the Bologna process, although it did so in other policy areas during the same period. This translates into weak capabilities of the ministry with regard to Bologna in practice. The unique institutional starting point of the English HE system in conjunction with the different role of international perceptions in English policy formulation on the Bologna process and the weak capabilities of the ministry in this regard, explain the low degree of change in this context. For the English case, the four factors in conjunction also explain the policy output with respect to Bologna, but only if a positive attitude to European cooperation is added to strong perceptions of the international context as a moderating variable.

To conclude, when analysed simultaneously, the four explanatory factors captured in the individual hypotheses can explain a great deal of the observed policy change in the four HE systems. While the individual hypotheses were only partially supported on the basis of bivariate correlations, the overall model is useful to summarise and explain national outcomes and international differences in policy change. For an overview, the analysis of this section is summarised in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1: Effect of four explanatory factors on policy change[a]

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
National preferences and problem pressure	++	+	++	- (+*)
Formal constraints / informal constraints	--/--	++/-	--/--	++/-- (++/-*)
Perceptions of international context	++	++	+	-- (+*)
Capabilities of the national ministry	--	++	++	-- (+*)
Policy change along seven dimensions	H	HM	HM-ML	L (HM*)
Implementation policy	ML	H	HM	does not apply
Overall policy change	HM	H-HM	HM	L (HM*)

[a] *This refers to policy change in the context of adaptations of degree structures in the course of the Bologna process. For England, the results with respect to general policy change i.e., independent of the Bologna process, are added in parentheses and denoted with an asterisk (*).The judgements on the degree of policy change are drawn from Table 10.1. 7. ++ = positive effect, + = weakly positive effect, -- = negative effect, - = weakly negative effect. H = high, srilekhaHM = high to moderate, ML = moderate to low, L = low.*

11.2.2 Two lessons

To conclude the reflection of hypotheses, I would like to highlight two overarching findings in relation to the explanatory factors that seem of particular policy relevance. The first concerns the relationship between actor preferences derived from the national institutional setting and actor perceptions of the international context (hypotheses I and II). The second is about the role of capabilities of the national ministry in charge of HE in overcoming informal constraints (hypotheses III and IV).

NATIONAL PREFERENCES AND INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTIONS. In the theoretical framework, I assigned a key role to the perception of the international context as

the factor that could potentially overcome national informal constraints and thus allow for a higher degree of policy change than predicted by North's original model (see section 3.1). The analysis has shown that actor perceptions of the international context did indeed support national policy change, but only in conjunction with national preferences. Perceptions of the international context were often used to legitimate and support national preferences; they sometimes also provided their base. The legitimating power of these international perceptions—e.g., in the form of role models derived from other HE systems— was extremely high and they were rarely questioned. Through these mechanisms, perceptions of the international context had a strong re-enforcing effect on national change. Preferences and perceptions thus conditioned and reinforced each other mutually. In the terms of path dependence theory, international perceptions did indeed lead to positive feedback loops and lock-in, and help explain why such a high degree of change in HE systems could be achieved in a relatively short period of time. But national preferences remain the *conditio sine qua non* for national change. This finding may be disappointing to the 'internationalists' among education reformers. It implies that the idea of the creation of a European HE area as such is not compelling enough to mobilise change, but can be effective only to the degree that it coincides with national interests. Actually, it is precisely this coincidence of national interest and a shared European agenda that accounts for the comparably high degree of change in the context of Bologna process—in any case high by comparison with what can normally be expected from HE reforms (see for example Ladislav Cerych & Paul Sabatier, 1986).

I also found that the perceptions of the international context were often selective and therefore biased, sometimes wrong, and strongly differed between national HE systems. Although this is sometimes assumed by critics,[374] they were however hardly ever conscious 'lies' spread by some actors to influence the process in their interest. More often, a combination of selective interests and the confines of an action sphere made for a biased perception of the international context, and rendered actors complacent in their interpretation.[375] While the subjectivity of these perceptions is fully in line with the new institutionalist assumptions and therefore not surprising, the finding is nevertheless highly relevant in the context of the Bologna process. In conjunction with the voluntary nature of the entire process and the strong degree to which it was driven by

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[374] This idea was repeatedly voiced in the interviews by those critical for the reforms implemented in the name of Bologna in the respective HE systems.

[375] As hinted at in methodological chapter 4, it can be argued that these 'perceptions' were in some cases arguments derived from selective reception of the international context, and spread by 'policy entrepreneurs' to advance the reform and move it into a certain direction (Kingdon, 1984; North, 1990: 5)

national interest, it helps to explain why national HE systems did not converge more clearly to a common model.

CAPABILITIES OF THE NATIONAL MINISTRY AND INFORMAL CONSTRAINTS. Another important result concerns the role of the national ministries responsible for HE in overcoming informal constraints. My analysis revealed that—whether the respective national ministry had the formal capability to do so—new regulation was never passed without prior consultation of stakeholders in each of the four countries. Where it was formally possible it was still politically unfeasible, and where it was politically feasible the respective ministries still chose to consult stakeholders. So whatever the exact nature of the formal capabilities of the respective ministry, they resorted to a consultative approach. National policy formulation on the Bologna process in all the four countries could be described as a variety of "negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy" (Scharpf, 1997, see chapter 3.2.5). The hierarchical element was strongest in France, followed by the Netherlands, Germany, and lastly England.

I also found that the quality of national policy formulation—in terms of its chances for successful implementation—crucially depended on the ability of the national ministry to organise and lead a national reform dialogue. This in turn hinged on its strategic leadership, which was more important than its formal ability to initiate and pass regulation. Of course, the latter helped because it established a credible fall-back position for negotiations in the shadow of hierarchy.

Linking this to the discussion on the gap between policy formulation in the seven dimensions and implementation policy, the latter can largely be explained by the different capabilities of national ministries to effectively organise the national coordination and negotiation of interests. While backed by strong formal powers, the French ministry opted for a mixture of persuasion and incentives and pursued a highly consultative approach. It managed to convince the vast majority of universities to voluntarily make the transition to two-cycle degree structures (referred to as 'LMD' in France) in the timeframe it had foreseen for the reform (i.e., in four annual 'waves', starting from autumn 2003). In the Netherlands, the ministry's authority to bundle and guide the national debate on the Dutch response to the Bologna process was unquestioned, in spite of the fact that HEIs in the Netherlands enjoy a much higher formal degree of institutional autonomy than in France. In both countries the regulatory change ultimately enacted was based on a high degree of consensus among the national actors, meaning that formal and informal policy change largely went hand in hand—in the Netherlands even more than in France.

In the context of the Bologna process, the English and the German national ministries[376] did not possess a similarly unquestioned authority. In Germany this

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[376]   Referred to as 'Department'.

was due to the federalist system, and in England due to the tradition of university autonomy, which in the case of the Bologna process was particularly relevant as the power to design their own degree programmes and award their own degrees was at the heart of this tradition. Moreover, for a long time the English ministry did not assume a leadership role in the Bologna process even to the extent it could have. This led to a situation where no legal provision was passed at all to translate the Bologna agenda into national policies. The national leadership function was assumed instead by a national round-table (the High Level Policy Forum) and a coordinating body (the UK HE Europe Unit) under the informal guidance of the national vice chancellors' conference. Other functions were assumed by buffer organisations such as the Quality Assurance Agency and the Funding Council. In Germany, the Standing Conference of the German *Länder* Ministers did not have the capacity to organise a systematic national debate due to the difficulty of coordination between the *Länder*. This resulted in the described implementation gap. Moreover, assuming a regional perspective, the *Länder* were generally less internationally-oriented than the national ministry: another contributor to slowing down the process of policy formulation.

12 Concluding reflections

In this chapter, I first discuss the major contributions of this study (section 12.1) before proceeding to a critical reflection of the chosen theoretical and methodological approach (section 12.2). Based on this review, I propose avenues for further research (section 12.3). I conclude by suggesting some policy lessons that seem relevant to the future of the Bologna process (section 12.4).

12.1   Contributions of this study

I begin this concluding reflection by summarising what I in retrospect consider the central theoretical and empirical contributions of this study.

12.1.1 Theoretical contributions

This study makes three major contributions to the advancement of our theoretical understanding of HE policy and policy analysis in general. First, it integrates elements from North's theory of institutional change and Scharpf and Mayntz' actor-centred institutionalism into a common framework suited to explain policy change in the course of the Bologna process. Given its roots in these broader theories, it would only take a few modifications to apply this theoretical framework to the analysis of any other reform process in HE and—if the seven dimensions are replaced by another set—even to reforms in other policy fields.

Second, this study is one of the few that consistently applies actor-centred institutionalism to a policy field. Apart from Schimank's (1995) study on research at universities, it is the only study known to me that applies the approach to the HE field.[377] The small number of published applications of this perspective pays testimony to the fact that developing a stylised picture of actor constellations as an explanatory tool—as aimed for by Scharpf and Mayntz—is notoriously difficult. The theoretical and methodological choices that enabled this application to such a highly complex policy process can help facilitate the application of the approach to similar issues.

Third, this study links the scholarly analysis of the Bologna process back to the existing tradition in comparative HE research. By applying a broader theoretical framework to the Bologna process, this study puts this unique European reform process somewhat into perspective and demonstrates how it relates to the

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[377]   Hohn and Schimank's (1990) study deals with the research system.

perennial issues of HE research and reform such as the relationship between different types of HEIs or between HE and the employment system, access to HE, and the like.

12.1.2 Empirical contributions

The study contributes to our empirical understanding of the Bologna process and HE policy generally in a range of ways. The case studies of Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England give the first in-depth reconstruction of the policy formulation processes on adaptations of national degree structures in the course of the Bologna process in these countries. Beyond providing the factual basis for the analysis presented in this study, they can serve as stepping-stones for future research and help policy makers understand the developments in other European HE systems in more depth.

This study is also the first to systematically make the content of the original policy documents and the national debates in the four HE systems internationally accessible. By taking care to make unique national concepts and debates understandable for an international audience and introducing a common terminology for the international comparison, the study performs a cultural and contextual 'translation' task.

In addition, this is one of the few comparative studies of the Bologna process performed by a single researcher according to a common theoretical framework. The research design allows a more systematic cross-national analysis of different aspects of the reform and reduces the risk of bias and blind spots compared to studies compiled of reports produced by different national HE experts.

The study illuminates the differences in national institutional settings and according driving forces for change, actor preferences, national discourses, and the dynamics of actor interaction underlying the policy change observed so far. This analysis helps to contextualise the reforms and provides the basis for understanding the further development of the Bologna process in the next few years.
Finally, the study could be of interest to HE researchers studying other reforms in cross-national perspective as it provides general insights into how national policy formulation in HE is conditioned by the national institutional setting and actor capabilities.

12.2 Reflection of theory and methodology

In the following sections I reflect on five key elements of the chosen research approach: the integration of North and Scharpf into a common framework (12.2.1), the focus on organisational actors (12.2.2), the thematic focus and choice of countries (12.2.3), and the timing of this study (12.2.4).

12.2.1 Integrating the frameworks of North and Scharpf/Mayntz

The integration of elements from North's theory of institutional change and Scharpf and Mayntz' actor-centred institutionalism is a theoretical contribution of this study. Overall, the frameworks of North and Scharpf proved compatible and complementary, and combining the institution-and actor-centred perspectives turned out to be indispensable for capturing the nature of the Bologna process. The theoretical model was particularly suited to analyse the interaction between the institutional setting and actors in national HE policy by looking at institutional driving forces and constraints and the way these influenced actor orientations. At some points, combining the two theoretical perspectives to an integrated framework posed challenges and required defining choices.

One such point concerned the match between North's focus on institutional change and Scharpf/Mayntz' focus on the policy process. My solution was to integrate the two by conceptualising policy change as a form of institutional change.

Another point relates to my particular research interest in analysing the role of the cultural dimension in different national responses to the Bologna process, as highlighted in the introduction. North's concept of informal constraints (and my extension to informal features) provided me with an interesting research perspective for approaching this question. While it is a powerful and elegant theoretical idea, applying it to the analysis of HE reform required breaking down North's abstract concept to concrete aspects of the institutional system. This was achieved by means of the seven dimensions. Given the complexity of the institutional fabric of HE systems, the analysis necessarily had to remain somewhat exemplary. Furthermore, as to be expected on the basis of North's theory, the informal features were often implied in the formal features of the institutional setting, so that I analysed them in conjunction. Finally, to integrate North's perspective with actor-centred institutionalism, the relationship between informal features as part of the institutional setting and Scharpf/Mayntz' concept of actor perceptions provided a challenge. I show how the two are linked through the concept of shared perceptions or mental maps. Methodologically, I dealt separately with informal features and actor perceptions; though their close relationship surfaced repeatedly in the analysis. At this point, the mutual conditioning of institutions and actors is thus particularly close.

Another tricky point was the treatment of actor capabilities; which according to Scharpf/Mayntz belongs to the actor side but could equally well have been conceptualised as part of the institutional setting under a heading such as 'HE governance system' or the like. I opted for the former to avoid a confusion of levels: the seven institutional dimensions of the HE system in my study are 'second order institutions'. Actor capabilities are a 'first order institution' that determine the rules of the game for changing the former. Other researchers ask

how HE governance itself is changed in the course of the Bologna process (Knill & Dobbins, forthcoming), but that was not the focus of this study.

Analysing both the institutional conditions and the dynamics of actor interaction provided valuable insights into the differences in national policy formulation beyond just looking at one or the other. Of course, this integrated approach imposed some limitations on the research design. In particular, the combined analysis bore the cost of reduced detail in each of the two aspects. Both the analysis of formal and informal constraints and their change over time, as well as the fine-grained dissection of the types of actors, actor orientations, constellations, and modes of interaction would merit individual studies in their own right. Pursuing more depth would have required me to limit myself either to a single HE system, a single institutional dimension, or to a subset of actors.

Focusing on predominant attributes of the actor dynamics such as predominant preferences, not all individual actors' attributes could receive equal representation in the study. Again such compromises were necessary to limit complexity and enable cross-country comparison, but in-depth analyses on individual aspects are a logical avenue for follow-up to this study.

While a holistic assessment of institutional conditions and the dynamics of actor interaction proved valuable, still I found that—with hindsight—the differences in national policy change were ultimately conditioned to a large extent by the respective institutional frameworks of HE systems. These in turn conditioned the way the HE systems were able to deal with the underlying pressures of ubiquitous social and economic trends.

12.2.2 Focus on organisational actors

In this study, I analyse the interaction of organisational rather than individual actors. This decision was based on the new-institutionalist assumption that an individual actor's view is to a large extent conditioned by the organisation for which he or she works. I chose this perspective to reduce complexity and to make a comparative analysis of four countries feasible. From a birds-eye view, this research perspective captured the main actor positions and the dynamics of national policy formulation processes remarkably well. However, it imposed a number of limitations that bear a certain risk of biasing reality, and imply methodological challenges.

First, the approach did limit the analysis of the influence of individuals on the process, be they ministers or senior officials of ministries and other organisations. Examples include the role of the French minister in charge of HE Claude Allègre in launching the Sorbonne declaration, or head of the HE department of the German national education ministry Hans-Rainer Friedrich in bundling the German response to the Bologna process. Important political moves often implied that individuals diverted from the agreed position of their organisation or at least

stretched it further than expected. An example is the English Minister of State Tessa Blackstone's signing of the Sorbonne declaration without much consultation within her ministry or with English stakeholders. The confinement to organisational actors—for all its merits—necessarily has to also be abstracted from the role of personal informal networks within and between organisations for bringing about policy change. An example are the close ties between Claude Allègre as minister in charge of HE and Francine Demichel as head of the HE department, who entered the political stage and launched the French reform process in tandem.

Second, it became clear from the interviews that not all organisational representatives really spoke on behalf of their organisation, even if they were explicitly asked to do so. I identified several reasons: some organisations were too loose or internally subdivided to allow for an integrated organisational standpoint, or the organisation had not yet developed a formal position on relevant policy issues. More importantly however, not all representatives identified that closely with their organisation, even if they formally represented it. This finding challenges a central assumption of actor-centred institutionalism. While individuals were always influenced by their institutional background, I found that sometimes that background was not identical with their formal role; or different institutional affinities overlapped and another context—sometimes from the recent past—came through more strongly than the perspective they were officially speaking from. To give an example, representatives from a ministry that come from the HE sector tend to bring to bear that perspective and experience upon their new task. Similarly, individuals who are repeatedly sent to represent their organisation in European meetings clearly develop a more internationally-oriented perspective than their base organisation. Again, this finding stresses the independent role of individuals as opposed to organisations. It did not constitute a methodological problem for my study as I took care to distinguish between personal and organisational views, but it reduced the extent to which I could use the interviews for illuminating the orientations of specific organisational actors.

Third, not all perceptions and preferences of organisational actors were publicly expressed. The requirements of actor-centred institutionalism implied that I could not work with anonymous interview quotes that could have captured the 'street talk' within an organisation or even across a national context. Instead, I was confined to interviews with official representatives of organisations so that the names of my interviewees could easily be reconstructed even if I had not included them in the appendix. This in turn implied that a lot of interesting statements voiced in the interviews could not be used in a direct way as they were either voiced off-record or even if they were not, it would not have been adequate to make them identifiable. In a sociological institutionalist approach, it would be easier to integrate such empirical findings without ascribing them to certain individuals. I did however use this data to identify the predominant preferences and perceptions reported in the comparative analysis.

In retrospect it would have been fruitful to choose a research perspective that gives more room to the role of individuals in the process while retaining the new-institutionalist approach, such as the sociological research undertaken by the *Centre de Sociologie des Organisations* (CSO) in Paris (see for example Musselin, 2004; Ravinet, 2005b) The focus on organisational actors creates a stylised picture which though useful, cannot always do justice to all aspects of reality that contributed to the observed policy outputs. This would however have necessitated limiting myself to a single or a maximum of two countries.

12.2.3 Thematic focus and country choice

To assess the adaptations of degree structures in a broader institutional context, I developed and used seven thematic dimensions. They proved a useful lens that allowed for the comprehensive assessment of adaptations of degree structures and a systematic cross-country comparison. Only a few pertinent topics came up in the research process that could not be captured under one of the seven dimensions. These include the nexus between teaching and research as well as both inter-institutional and international student mobility and recognition of credits and degrees. The latter are in fact crucial elements of the Bologna process, as enhancing mobility and recognition are the main reasons convergence of HE systems is sought. While I have not dealt with these issues directly, the low degree of convergence among the HE systems I found so far raises questions on the success of the Bologna process as such. I return to this point in section 12.4 on policy implications.

   The selection of HE systems for this study fulfilled its purpose, namely to allow for international comparison that sharpens the view of the unique features of national policy change and of the decisive factors that shaped it in the respective countries. The four HE systems displayed very different institutional starting conditions in the seven dimensions, different modes of actor interaction in the policy process, and different adaptive responses. Integrating the English case into the study required particular empirical efforts as it necessitated mapping changes in the seven dimensions in- and outside of the Bologna process. This proved worthwhile as it drew attention to the degree to which the Bologna process is used by actors in the other three European countries to bundle and promote change that could in principle also take place independent of the Bologna process.

12.2.4 Timing of the study

The timing of the study is crucial in relation to my research objective to compare and explain policy change in the context of adaptations of degree structures. It goes without saying that I could only take into account changes that took place so

far; given the time needed for data analysis and writing, I had to stop data collection in autumn 2004. Since only five years have passed between the Bologna declaration and the end point of my analysis, it was clear from the outset that it was too early to evaluate policy implementation (see section 2.2.2). On the other hand, 2004 is almost halfway to 2010, the year by which the objectives of the Bologna process are to be fulfilled. From a political perspective, the timing seems right for assessing the policy change achieved so far, and possibly drawing conclusions for the further course of reforms (Musselin, 2005). I will come back to this question in section 12.4 on policy implications.

It emerged from my research that feedback processes from implementation back into policy formulation are still in motion as well; and that the assessment of policy change also has to remain somewhat preliminary. In five years time we will know what happened in the meantime. However, the underlying problem cannot be solved. Like institutional change, policy change is a never-ending process, so picking out two points in time as start and end for the analysis necessarily has to remain somewhat artificial. It would be impossible to find a timing at which policy change or institutional change are complete.

Methodologically, the Bologna process as an ongoing development posed opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, it allowed me to interview many representatives of organisational actors that played or still play a role in the formulation of national policies on adaptations of degree structures at a point in time where their memories were still quite fresh. It also eased access to policy documents that might not be readily available anymore in a few years' time. On the other hand, dealing with previously unpublished perceptions and preferences behind certain formal actor positions or political decisions required particular care given that negotiations on some aspects of policy formulation are still ongoing.

Despite the time-sensitivity that this study shares with any contemporary historical analysis, the timing of this study proved useful because:

(1) central political decisions that determine the direction of the reforms have already been taken;

(2) knowing about and understanding policy change in other HE systems at the mid-point of the Bologna process is of particular relevance for policy makers with a view to adjusting national policy formulation and increasing European convergence;

(3) most importantly, because this study not only maps policy change but illuminates the underlying differences in institutional conditions, driving forces for change, national discourses, and the dynamics of national policy formulation.

These will retain their validity even if the concrete details of policy outputs are still subject to modification. Understanding them is the basis for analysing adjustments in policies and implementation processes in the next few years, and

even provide hints as to which policy areas can still expect particularly strong adjustment processes. Moreover, the appreciation of these national specifics is a prerequisite for true international understanding.

12.3   Avenues for further research

This section summarises the avenues for future research that arise from the discussion in the last section.

Some of the theoretical perspectives combined in the framework of this study could be individually pursued in more depth in further studies. Examples include the interaction of formal and informal institutions in the change process, national actor constellations and interaction in selected policy arenas, and the different forms of path dependence.

On path dependence, it seems fruitful to pursue the role of the two main variants introduced in section 2.5 in more depth; 'continuity, persistence and inertia' on the one hand and 'critical junctures, feedback loops and lock-in' on the other. While the integrated framework of this study yielded a comparative analysis of the nature and degree of change, the unique combination of both forms of path dependence in the Bologna process remains a puzzle worth further investigation. Depending on the perspective, examples for inertia of inherited systems and for the lock-in of entirely new development paths can be found. It would be interesting to further investigate their relative role, place, and importance. In which areas does inertia prevail? Where does the particular dynamics of the Bologna process enable radical change, and how can both exist side by side? An aspect worth further study as part of the research on 'critical junctures' is the role of sequencing in national and European policy formulation. The present case studies provide the material for identifying the critical moments for the lock-in of key decisions on the length, titles, and types of two-cycle degrees; taking into account the interaction between the European and national levels.

Similarly, some of the thematic dimensions included in this study merit more detailed analysis. Future case studies or cross-country comparisons could focus on the implications of adaptations of degree structures for selected dimensions of HE systems, such as access to the Masters level or the relationship between different types of HEIs.

Another set of research ideas relates to ways to expand or shift the scope of this study. Expanding the regional scope beyond Western Europe to the Nordic countries, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean would provide an additional test for the applicability of the theoretical framework and generate comparable empirical insights into policy change in the course of the Bologna process in other institutional contexts. To complement the theoretical perspective assumed in this study, it would be worthwhile to put the focus on the role of

individuals and personal networks in the policy formulation processes at national and European levels. In a few years' time, the study could be complemented thematically by additional lenses on the Bologna process, such as the effect of adaptations of degree structures on the nexus between teaching and research, and the mutual recognition of credits, degrees, and student mobility. As highlighted before, the latter is highly relevant from a political perspective as recognition and mobility are the core rationale for seeking the convergence of HE systems.

I have discussed in some detail that it is still too early to assess the implementation of the policies on the adaptation of degree structures. With the groundwork of an understanding of policy change laid by this study, a number of implementation studies are the way forward. Around 2010, follow-up studies will be able to more comprehensively capture national implementation and its feedback on adjustments in national policy formulation, and thus allow for more robust statements on institutional change. The approach chosen in this study at the country level could also be extended to the level of individual HEIs, including both institutional management and the departmental level. Follow-up studies could analyse the preferences, perceptions, and capabilities of HEIs or departments and how this affects the implementation of tiered degree structures on the ground.

12.4 Policy implications

This study has deliberately not assumed a normative stance, and has taken a policy-analysis perspective rather than undertaken implementation research (see section 2.2). This implies that the focus of the study was not to 'assess progress' in implementing the Bologna objectives, but to analyse and compare the various ways of translating them into national policies. Nevertheless, at this point a few normative thoughts seem merited.

By means of conclusion, I would like to draw attention to a number of lessons that could be particularly relevant for policy makers in making the Bologna process work at the system level, as well as for staff at the level of HEIs. I highlight the importance of deepened international reform dialogue stemming from the context-specificity of national policy formulation and propose a range of specific issues on which such dialogue could be particularly beneficial. Finally, I attempt to look to the possible future of the Bologna process.

12.4.1 Deepening international understanding of national context-specificity

The object of this study is the adaptation of national degree structures in the context of a European process. We have seen that the stated objectives of the Bologna process were underpinned by a multitude of national HE reform interests. These two—stated common objectives and differing underlying national

driving forces—interacted and influenced the policy outputs at European and national levels. At a national level, the decisive influence of institutional settings and the dynamics of actor interaction led to very different reform outputs.

In the light of this result, the most immediate policy implication of my study is the need to deepen the mutual understanding between policy makers from different national backgrounds on how Bologna reforms in their partner countries are bound by the respective national context. At the same time, this study hopes to provide a contribution to this mutual understanding as a prerequisite for building a European HE area.

I have demonstrated that while joint declarations at the European level provide the formal framework for the Bologna process, the respective national institutional contexts soon dominated when it came to translating these declarations into actual adaptations of national degree structures. At crucial turning points in national policy formulation, all four HE systems included in this study displayed a remarkable extent of inward-orientation. The respective policy formulation processes followed their own nationally-driven dynamics; and international role models were only used to legitimate the preferences of national actors, not to bring about true convergence.

The quest for European convergence was further impeded by the absence of common orientation marks, a logical consequence of the choice of a 'bottom-up approach' based only on voluntary agreements between autonomous nation states. I do not mean to say that such common orientation marks should be externally imposed, but that in their absence national policy makers need to devote more attention, care, and energy to understanding developments in other European countries and considering their implications for national policy formulation. Based on my study, it seems that national actors in HE policy have used the Bologna follow-up process too much for demonstrating that they have been 'good pupils' rather than exploring the scope for actual convergence of concepts behind the buzzwords. Or where such dialogue is already ongoing in networks of experts and officials such as ENQA, ENA, the Joint Quality Initiative, the TUNING project and the like, the impact on national policy formulation remained limited.

The self-organised interaction of the European and national levels in the Bologna process has implications for those who promote it at the European level as well as for national policy makers. Actors involved in policy formulation at the European level need to have a realistic view of the national incentives and constraints to reform to be able to agree on realistic goals and timelines. National policy makers need to understand the incentives and constraints of those who have entered the process with them, and with whom they jointly commit themselves. At a national level, failure to understand the institutional heritage of partner countries can lead to misunderstandings and misguided national policies—assuming that European convergence is aimed at.

12.4.2 Intensifying international policy dialogue

As discussed in the previous section, the impact of existing formal networks of experts and decision makers on national policy formulation has so far been limited for two reasons: First, the circle of participants has remained too small. Often, only one or two people from each organisational actor in HE policy are delegated for international liaison and routinely sent to the respective meetings. Second, those involved in these international networks are, at times, insufficiently integrated into their domestic institutions.[378]

A consistent finding from my interviews is that personal participation in European-level meetings and activities tends to foster a positive attitude towards the idea of the European HE area and increases enthusiasm for mutual policy learning. This is not to deny the important influence of national interests (perceptions) as an important aspect in this study, but to think about how to optimise the possible counter-balancing effect from internationally-oriented perceptions. If European exchange on HE policy remains confined to a small circle of 'usual suspects' whose ability to influence their institutions is limited, their views can become disengaged from the views of the organisation they are supposed to represent, and cannot feed back into national policy formulation.[379] Extending the circle of people involved in European dialogue in HE would be a means to alleviate this problem.

The importance of individuals for the policy process also has implications for the highest policy level. As Ravinet (2005a, 2005b) has shown, the Sorbonne declaration was based on close personal ties between the involved ministers. With the change of governments in the course of the Bologna process, these ties were lost. Re-establishing international dialogue at the highest political level and maintaining its continuity is needed for the shared aims of the Bologna process not to be lost.

The international policy dialogue can most fruitfully be intensified in areas where national differences are strong and potentially hinder the attainment of the shared Bologna goals. In the following sections I identify five areas for which this is the case, briefly depict the current differences, and highlight the advantages of international dialogue and coordination.

TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL TO HE. Quite some effort has been devoted to defining the levels of Bachelor and Masters degrees based on years of full-time

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[378] Interestingly, Van der Wende (1996) found the same empirical result at the institutional level for people representing their HEIs in international and European networks.

[379] This disengagement is mirrored in an ambiguous evaluation of the impact of these European processes by national actors. Those involved tend to judge their effect highly. The former president of the EUA even deemed it dangerous that key decisions for the future of European HE are effectively taken by such a small circle of experts. Actors in national HE policy on the other hand, tend to think lowly of the impact of European-level meetings and agreements.

studies or ECTS credits. With the development of the European qualifications framework, initial steps have been made to conceptualise degree levels in term of competencies. Obviously, what can be achieved in the three to four years up to the first degree depends to a large extent on the entry levels to HE. Secondary education, on which the first degrees have to built, has however largely slipped attention. Prior schooling requirements still differ substantially between countries and between types of HEIs within countries. Differences exist with regard to the number of years of study and the orientation of education, particularly with respect to the balance between breadth and depth. The percentage of an age group that qualifies for HE also varies significantly between countries.

The examples of Germany and England serve to illustrate the national differences between countries with regard to the transition to higher education and to show the scope for dialogue on secondary education among them. In Germany, the broad orientation of the *Abitur* has traditionally been mandatory for entry to HE, while the English have prided themselves of the high degree of specialisation reached in a few selected A-level courses. Within the UK, differences in orientation of secondary schooling are the argumentative basis for the four-year length of the Scottish Honours as opposed to the three-year length of the English Honours degree. Consequently, English actors tend to expect countries with broader secondary schooling to need longer to reach the level of the first degree. This is a standard argument applied by English actors with respect to German and other continental European education systems. Ironically, the specialist A levels do not, to date, qualify for entry into HE in Germany.

On top of these unsolved issues, secondary schooling in Germany, the Netherlands, and England has undergone significant reforms in the last few years. These are relevant for the transition to HE as they have changed the length of prior schooling, the balance between breadth and depth or the percentage of an age group that attains the final school-leaving examination. The English reforms directed towards broadening their secondary education for example, twist the picture further as they could undermine the English argument for needing less time towards the Honours degree than other countries. In none of the countries have these reforms been discussed in the context of the Bologna process.

This is particularly delicate as the longer duration and higher level of secondary education in Europe compared to the United States was a key argument used by the French and the German education ministers Allègre and Rüttgers in 1998 when agreeing that the first degree in Europe should only take a minimum of three years as opposed to four years in the United States. Within Europe, too, prior secondary education plays an important role in the recognition frameworks of the ENIC/NARIC offices. The mutual understanding and acceptance of each others' secondary schooling models will therefore be a necessary prerequisite if the European HE area is to be built on solid ground.

NATURE OF THE FIRST DEGREE. Another area were a lack of international dialogue has so far impeded progress is the conception of the first degree, drawn between

the demands to prepare for employment or further studies and research. While the Bologna declaration includes only the vague formulation that the first degree should be "of relevance to the European labour market", its signatory countries have opted for very different national policy formulation. In the Netherlands, the traditional division of tasks—professional HE at *hogescholen*, academic HE at universities—was maintained in practice, even if the legal possibility was opened for both types of HEIs to offer both types of degrees. *Hogeschool* Bachelor degrees are meant to prepare for employment, university Bachelor degrees for further studies. In France, the dichotomy between academic versus professional first degrees (*licence generale* versus *licence professionelle*) runs right through universities. At *grandes écoles*, no Bachelor-level first degree was created. In Germany, Bachelor degrees at both universities and *Fachhochschulen* were legally defined to "qualify for a profession", at the same time they are meant to qualify for further studies. The inherent tensions between the two aims are thus played out in a continuum of conceptions without formal classification. While the traditional German distinction between universities and *Fachhochschulen* continues to live on to some degree, it was weakened by this conception. And in England, the majority of graduates have traditionally entered the labour market with an Honours degree, without employers particularly bothering about their application-orientation.

A whole spectrum of national solutions has emerged, and convergence to a common model is hardly in sight. Awareness and mutual understanding of the different conceptions are prerequisites for the creation of national and European policies that support the Bologna goals and the development of a European HE area. They could also somewhat relax the national efforts to find consistent national degree classification schemes that are in any case inconsistent with those of the neighbour countries.

RESEARCH BASE OF MASTERS PROGRAMMES. Some form of distinction between research-oriented and professionally-oriented Masters programmes has been introduced or already existed in all four HE systems included in this study, but the definition of the 'research Masters' and the means for assuring its quality differ substantially. In Germany and France every Masters programme is either categorised as application-/professionally-oriented or research-oriented, while in the Netherlands the research Masters is a separate category with particularly strict requirements where only a small number of 'academic' Masters qualifies as research programmes. In France, the *habilitation* process for all Masters programmes is structurally different from the one for undergraduate programmes. It is based on academic peer review coordinated by the MSTP, with a particular view to the research base of these programmes. The ministry justified the tightening of criteria for Masters programmes, and for research Masters in particular, by the aim of improving the competitive position of European HE vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In Germany, Bachelor and Masters programmes are basically subject to the same accreditation process, only criteria differ. At the

Masters level, they are differentiated between a professionally- and a research-oriented profile. Accreditation is based on academic peer review but organised separately from research evaluation, which remained the domain of the *Wissenschaftsrat*. In England, research as opposed to taught degrees are defined by the mode of learning; research degrees always include a major thesis. The extent to which professionally-oriented degrees have to be based on research capacity also differs across HE systems.

With a view to creating a European HE area, more attention should be given to developing a common European understanding of the 'research Masters' or at least making the current differences in conception more transparent.

DOCTORAL EDUCATION. Related to the last point, an integrated view of graduate education, including the Masters and the doctoral phase, has slipped the attention of many national governments participating in the Bologna process for a long time. This perspective was present in the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations, which had still subsumed doctoral education under the second cycle which "should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries" (Bologna declaration, 1999). It was however, largely forgotten and only came back at the Berlin conference where doctoral education was now conceptualised as a "third cycle". There is the risk that some of the potential for developing integrated tracks of research and professional graduate education in graduate schools has already been wasted. In ongoing efforts to reach consensus on defining characteristics of European doctoral education (Bergen Communiqué, 2005; Christensen, 2005; EUA, 2005), this possibility should receive more attention.

POLICY-MAKING AS AN ISSUE OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE. Finally, this study has revealed interesting differences in the political strategies for national policy formulation on adaptations of degree structures. The national ministries responsible for HE have played very different roles in the process depending on their formal capacities, the relationship between the minister and the ministerial bureaucracy, the relationship with other actors in HE policy, common routines of policy-making such as white papers and hearings, the role and use of expert commissions, and the like. Given the importance of these differences for the quality of policy outputs, it would be fruitful to extend the European HE dialogue to the art of policy-making itself.

12.5 Outlook

The suggestions made so far have not questioned the current set-up and organisation of the Bologna process and were basically confined to appeals to the goodwill of national governments and other stakeholders. Given the low degree of convergence based on the approach of voluntary participation effected so far and the empirical dominance of national interests in the process, these

suggestions might be criticised for being naïve, and alternatives might be called for. Moreover, with the incentive of being 'good pupils' fading (section 12.4.1), one might be sceptical about the future of the process—as long as convergence is the policy aim.

Of course, a theoretical alternative to a path of intensified dialogue would be to shift and centralise responsibility in the Bologna process, either by resorting to a tighter organisation of the Bologna follow-up group or even by strengthening the influence of the European Commission. However, as explained in chapter 5, a decentralised and loosely-organised approach to the reform was chosen by the participants for good reasons, and this setup has in fact been key to the achievements so far. The influence of the European Commission has already successively increased throughout the process, and gained additional momentum by subsuming the Bologna process under the Lisbon agenda. Shifting the power balance further implies the risk of significantly stifling the motivation of national governments and other actors to constructively contribute to the reform. In light of these considerations, increasing the binding character of the Bologna follow-up process itself seems both preferable and more realistic than increasing the formal competencies for the European Commission.

It should also be acknowledged that the convergence of European HE systems is *de facto* not the only aim of the Bologna process. National reform agendas are part of the picture and provide important motivation for the reform. So if the Bologna process helps to overcome important national reform barriers and contributes to solving problems in national HE systems, this is also a significant achievement in itself. In other words, the 'success' of the Bologna process should not only be measured in terms of convergence but also in terms of the degree to which e.g., the drop-out rates in German and French HE are indeed reduced and graduation rates raised, the outward mobility of English students is increased, and the opportunities for lifelong learning in Dutch HE are maximised. While all these are examples of national reform agendas, their attainment would contribute in quite a direct way to increasing the attractiveness of the European HE area, and their significance from a European perspective should therefore also not be underestimated.

Finally, an alternative perspective on the question of recognition and mobility shall be proposed. Calling for an acceleration of convergence of HE systems is not the only possible response to the findings of this study. In parallel, I suggest to think afresh about targeted measures to improve recognition and mobility in the face of a certain degree of persistent diversity of national HE systems. This may sound at first like a step backwards or a mere re-branding of the well known and longstanding Commission policies in this field. What I mean is a bit more specific. It implies thinking harder than currently about (a) how to bring the conditions for mutual recognition of secondary education to the fore to enable student mobility even at the nexus between secondary and undergraduate education; and (b) how to maintain or even increase the level of mobility within programmes under the

new conditions of a two-cycle degree structure. It also implies the need to (c) recognise that the mobility between the first and the second cycle will not result automatically from the reforms, and design targeted measures to support it forcefully; (d) engage in a fresh round of bi- and multilateral negotiations on the conditions for the mutual recognition of graduate and undergraduate degrees; and (e) in the absence of (d), do the same at institutional levels through international networks of HEIs.

Such efforts could forestall the looming danger of 'provincialisation' of the Bologna reforms and give fresh impetus to the worthwhile vision that our children will one day move more freely and more easily within Europe—both as students and as knowledge workers—than has so far been possible for us.

English summary

Background

When the four ministers in charge of higher education (HE) of France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom met at the Sorbonne university in Paris in May 1998 to sign a joint declaration on what they called "harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system" (Sorbonne declaration, 1998), nobody anticipated that they would trigger one of the most far-reaching European HE reforms, which has since come to be known as the 'Bologna process'.

By June 1999, only a year later, as many as 29 European ministers in charge of HE had subscribed to similar aims. As signatories to the 'Bologna declaration' they expressed their intention to build a "European area of higher education" and to achieve "greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education" in order to "promote citizens' mobility and employability" and increase "the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education" vis-à-vis the rest of the world (Bologna declaration, 1999).

By 2006, 45 European countries inside and outside the European Union (EU) had joined the process. Reforms of national HE systems in this context are underway all over Europe.

The Bologna process is remarkable for several factors; above all its speed, its geographic scale, and the amount and depth of national HE reforms bundled under its flag. While European integration had been progressing continuously during the last decades in many areas, most notably the economic sphere, education policy had for a long time largely remained the domain of nation states. European national governments had decidedly and successfully defended their education systems against EU influence, as well as against any attempt at 'harmonisation' as expressed in Article 126 (149) of the Maastricht (Amsterdam) treaty. Against this backdrop, the 'sudden' willingness and interest of European ministers in charge of HE to increase cooperation and take initiatives to render their HE systems more similar is a historic step.

The process is interesting from a research perspective as its many ambiguities render its dynamics particularly complex: while it was consciously initiated outside of the EU context and soon covered HE systems inside and outside of the EU, it strongly resonates with aims and activities of the EU and is also increasingly interwoven with EU processes. Additionally, as it is a non-binding declaration of intent of national ministers in charge of HE, its 'implementation' is far from trivial: it depends on the interaction of national actors in HE policy for its

translation into policies, and is thus subject to a diversity of national interests, priorities, policy processes etc.

Research focus and approach

To reach the ambitious aims of the Bologna declaration, the ministers agreed on six so-called 'action lines'. Among the most far-reaching is action line two, which calls for the "adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate" (Bologna declaration, 1999). The translation of this goal into national policy formulation constitutes the research topic of this study.

A two-cycle system was novel to most European HE systems, which have historically shown a wide variety of degree structures. Most had traditionally organised their university studies in one long cycle leading directly to a Masters-level degree, and many had created a parallel non-university type of HE that led to a degree below that level. Moving to a two-cycle structure meant transforming these diverse systems into what is interchangeably referred to as 'Bachelor and Masters', 'undergraduate and graduate studies', 'first and second degree', or a 'two-tier' structure.

The reform of national degree structures is not only so far-reaching because it touches on deeply-enshrined educational traditions, but also because it is impossible to adjust degree structures without triggering important adaptations in related dimensions of national HE systems, as I show in this study. The goal also had consequences for those few European countries that traditionally had organised their national degree structures in two main cycles and were faced with the question of their "compatibility and comparability" (Bologna declaration, 1999) with those of other countries.

While not all of the reforms of national degree structures can be attributed exclusively to the Bologna process and were in some countries initiated prior to the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations, a great deal of reform in European HE has since been coordinated in the framework of the Bologna process. Consequently this study looks at the adaptation of national degree structures regarded in this context.

Beyond mapping these adaptations and the concomitant changes in relevant dimensions of the national HE systems, this study is interested in whether these changes lead to convergence between national HE systems. While the term 'convergence' is not mentioned in the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations, it is clearly the declarations' and the ensuing Bologna processes' leitmotif. The degree of convergence and the dimensions to which it shall extend remain, however, ambiguous. In terms of the adoption of a system of two cycles, it states only that the first cycle should last "a minimum of three years", be "relevant to the European labour market", and that "the second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries" (Bologna declaration,

1999). As this shall happen taking "full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of university autonomy" (Bologna declaration, 1999; see also De Wit & Verhoeven, 2001; Verbruggen, 2002), this study is interested in how the resulting tension between convergence and diversity (see Meek et al., 1996; Teichler, 1988c) plays out when it comes to translating the Bologna declaration into national policies.

Research questions

Based on these initial considerations, I focused this study on national level reforms in an internationally comparative approach that regards national degree structures in the context of other relevant dimensions of national HE systems and analyses their convergence among countries. This study addresses three research questions:

(1)   How are the national degree structures adapted in the context of the Bologna process and what changes does this imply for other relevant dimensions of the respective HE systems?

(2)   What explains the nature and degree of change in the respective HE systems and the similarities and differences between them?

(3)   Do the adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process contribute to the convergence of the respective HE systems?

Theoretical framework

Based on a review of the relevant literature from HE research, implementation research, policy research, and new institutionalism, I made the following defining choices: to define convergence as a process rather than an absolute state; not to use implementation analysis but a combination of actor- and institutional-oriented perspectives; and to account for the multi-actor, multi-level nature of modern HE governance. Finally, I sought to develop a framework that allows analysis of both forms of path dependence covered in the literature—one stressing continuity, persistence, and inertia (Goodin, 1996; Pierson, 1993, 2000b; Weir & Skocpol, 1985) — and one focusing on critical junctures, feedback loops, and lock-in (Arthur, 1994; Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

In light of these considerations, I developed a theoretical framework that draws on elements of Douglass North's (1990) model of institutional change, the perspective of actor-centred institutionalism (ACI) developed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf (1995; Scharpf 1997), and HE research. The framework captures two main elements and their interaction: institutions—here: the institutional

setting of national HE systems—and actors—here: the organisational actors in national HE policy. Actors are influenced by the institutional context in which they operate and in turn bring about institutional change. While North was instrumental in developing the general causal relationships, ACI helped obtain a more detailed representation of the dynamics of the policy formulation phase that results from the interaction of the various actors. The theoretical framework is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework
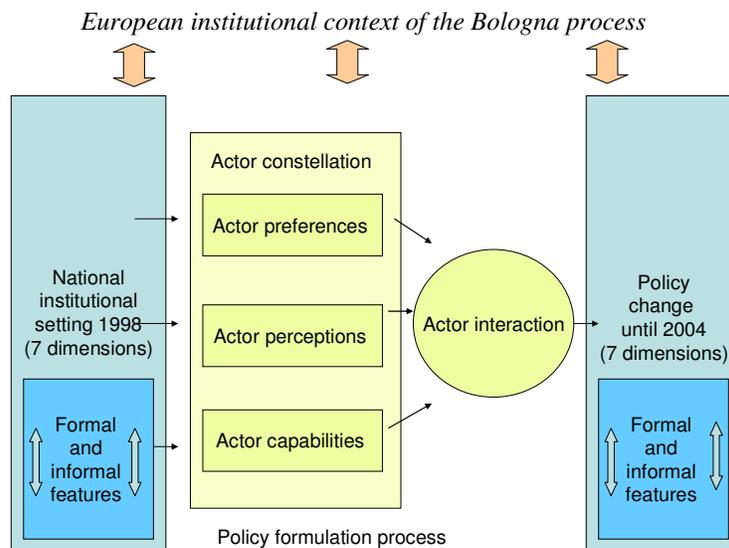
The framework provides the analytical lenses to examine the institutional setting of national HE systems in 1998 and policy change until 2004, as well as the participants and dynamics of the policy formulation process that help explain developments that caused the changes in this period. The key elements of the framework are:

(1)   The institutional side i.e., the national institutional setting in 1998, policy change until 2004, and their formal and informal features, analysed in seven dimensions.

(2)   The actor side i.e., the actor constellation (preferences, perceptions, capabilities) and their interaction in the policy formulation process. These actors are organisational rather than individual actors.

INSTITUTIONAL SIDE. In line with North (1990: 3), I adopt a broad understanding of institutions as "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, (…) the humanly devised constraints that shape human action". Following North, I distinguish two types of institutions: formal constraints such as legal provision, statues and contracts, and informal constraints such as "socially sanctioned norms of behaviour", "internally enforced standards of conduct", and "conventions" (ibid: 40). Informal constraints "come from socially transmitted information and are part of the heritage that we call culture" (ibid: 36); cultural features of societies such as traditions and inherited norms and values are thus included in this concept of institutions. Formal and informal constraints condition each other; laws for instance, often reflect generally accepted informal norms of behaviour or values, and if they are altered, create pressure on informal constraints to adjust accordingly. While this adjustment takes time and often results in inertia, radical change can occur provided a "representational redescription" of actors' mental maps—and thus an adjustment of informal constraints—takes place (Denzau & North, 1994) (22-23). In North's writings, the only occasions for this are wars and revolutions; I extend the model to include exposure of actors to the international context as a factor fostering representational redescription and thus informal institutional change. Furthermore, I also consider the possibility that the national institutional context itself provides incentives for institutional change. Applied to the Bologna process, this raises the empirical question of which forces will prevail: inertia stemming from the interlocking of formal and informal constraints or radical change stemming from exposure to the international context, or from national incentives for change.

As it is too early to assess the implementation of Bologna reforms at the level of individual HEIs, I concentrate on the analysis of policy change as one aspect and form of institutional change. Policy change also requires overcoming both informal constraints—such as by convincing national actors to adjust norms, values, and modes of conduct attached to the inherited institutional setting—and formal constraints—such as by adjusting legal provision.

I define seven analytical dimensions to structure the analysis of national institutional contexts. In addition to national degree structures, these include the relationship between different types of HEIs, curricular governance, curricula, access, transition from HE to employment, and funding. Each dimension includes formal and informal features. For example, while degree structures are laid down in HE laws and institutional statutes, they are simultaneously a reflection of widely-shared perceptions of what it takes to assume a certain role in society or perform a certain profession. The following table lists the sub-dimensions covered in the analysis.

Under 'national degree structures', I cover degree levels, types, and titles. The dimension 'institutional types' includes degree levels, types, and titles in relation to institutional types, their cooperation, and the permeability between them. By

'curricular governance' I refer to the nature of the quality assurance system, the degree of curricular diversity, and national capacity planning. The term 'curricula' refers to the internal structure of studies, the organisation of the academic year including credits and modularisation, the curricular culture, the stress on general education versus skills, and the discrepancy between the *de jure* and *de facto* length of studies. Under 'access', I cover relevant aspects of upper secondary education, entry rates to HE and an eventual increasing-participation agenda, and access to undergraduate education and to the Masters level. 'Transition to employment' includes what is seen as the first degree qualifying for the labour market and the relationship between HE and the public and private sectors. Finally, 'funding' denotes the level of spending on HE, the funding of the teaching function in particular, and tuition fees and student support.

ACTOR SIDE. From Mayntz and Scharpf I take the concepts for a more detailed analysis of the actor-side of the framework, namely actor constellation and actor interaction. The actor constellation is composed of the capabilities, perceptions, and preferences of all relevant actors, and is in turn influenced by the institutional setting.

The concept of *capabilities* denotes "all action resources that allow an actor to influence an outcome in certain respects and to a certain degree" (Scharpf 1997: 43) i.e., the competencies and roles of actors as defined by laws, statutes, and inherited relationships as well as their financial and personnel resources. *Perceptions* refer to actors' cognitive orientations i.e., their subjective perceptions of reality—including both facts and causal relationships—that may, but need not be correct. *Preferences* circumscribe a wide range of types of actor interests and goals, including their pure self-interest, preferences derived from organisational goals, missions or the normative limitations defined by the purpose of an organisation, and the *specific* interests and norms that a particular actor chooses on the basis of its 'corporate identity' or 'culture'.

While the actor constellation depicts the static picture of actors' relations regarding a proposed policy, the *mode of interaction* is concerned with the dynamics of actor interaction. It specifies how "that conflict is going to be resolved—through unilateral action, negotiation, voting, or hierarchical determination" (Scharpf, 1998: 72). The most frequent interaction modes in HE policy are negotiation, hierarchical determination, or a combination of both. "Negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy" (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995c), a frequent interaction mode in HE policy, describes a situation where the conditions for negotiating a consensus are improved by the threat of the unilateral imposition of a decision by state actors such as the ministry in charge of HE.

I use the theoretical framework in two major ways: (1) to guide the national case studies and the comparative analysis, and (2) to shed light on a selected number of specific causal relationships by means of a set of *hypotheses*.

Hypotheses

While the case studies provide a qualitative analysis of the nature of reforms, the hypotheses seek to explain the *degree* of policy change in HE systems brought about in the context of adaptations of national degree structures. The first three hypotheses focus on key aspects of the actor constellation to explain the degree of policy change, namely actor preferences (I), perceptions (II), and capabilities (III). The fourth hypothesis captures the effect of the benevolence of the initial institutional setting on the degree of policy change:

(I)   The more the national institutional setting supports *actor preferences* for change…
(II)   The more *actor perceptions* in an HE system are influenced by the international context…
(III)   The stronger the *capabilities of the national ministries responsible for HE* in the respective HE system…
(IV)   The less persistent *informal and formal constraints* of national HE systems…

…the more policy change takes place.

Figure 2: Graphical depiction of the hypotheses
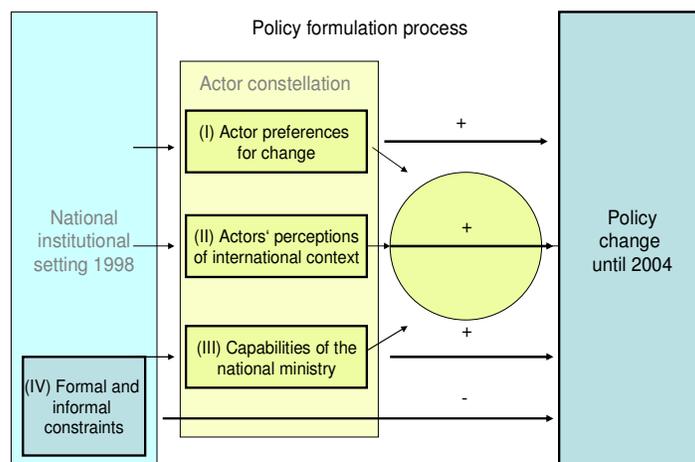
Methodology

At the heart of the empirical part are four national case studies of the HE systems of Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England between 1998 and 2004. Germany, France, and England were chosen to represent the three major historical reference models for European HE—namely the Humboldtian, the Napoleonic, and the Anglo-Saxon (Neave, 2001b). The English case plays a dual role both as a participant in the Bologna process and as a reference case for the two-cycle degree structure. While the Dutch HE system combines Humboldtian, Anglo-Saxon, and to some degree Napoleonic influences, its inclusion is largely justified by its importance as a champion of HE reform in Europe. Theoretical considerations such as yielding sufficient variation and practical considerations such as my mastery of the languages also played a role. The period covered starts one year prior to the Bologna declaration, the year of the Sorbonne conference, and ends six years later in autumn 2004 with the conclusion of data collection.

The research design deals with the research questions in a three-step process that proceeds in ascending levels of abstraction. First, the understanding of adaptations of degree structures in each of the four HE systems through in-depth national case studies is an empirical research objective in itself (research question 1). Second, the cross-case comparison of the four cases analyses differences and similarities in change between HE systems (research question 2) and identifies the degree of convergence (research question 3). Third and finally, key elements of the underlying theoretical framework are 'tested' for their ability to answer one aspect of research question 2, namely the degree of change. These purposes are combined in a comparative case-study design (Yin, 1984) that consists of three steps: individual case studies, cross-case comparison, and review of hypotheses.

The national case studies are structured in three parts: the first portrays "actors and their capabilities" and "the institutional setting in 1998", the second the "policy formulation" process and the last "policy change until 2004". The seven dimensions are used to structure both the initial institutional setting and policy change until 2004. In the comparative chapter, the dimensions are also used for systematic comparisons of initial settings and policy change. Given the profound methodological issues about the approximation of quasi-statistical methods by means of a case-study design (Lijphart, 1971; Mayntz, 2002; Peters, 1998; Scharpf, 1997, 2000a), step three, the 'testing' of hypotheses, is done in all modesty, serving as a stylised summary of my qualitative findings rather than a statistical test. Based on the complexity of the matter outlined in the case studies and their comparison, I expect that the hypotheses can help shed a focused light on a limited number of selected causal relationships, but cannot replace the much richer and more nuanced preceding analysis.

Data from primary sources as well as secondary data was analysed for this study, most of which was of a qualitative nature. At the core were about 95 expert and actor interviews in the four countries and the analysis of original policy documents. HE literature, quantitative data, and participant observation were other important sources.

Case studies

EUROPEAN CONTEXT. The European context for the ensuing national case studies was provided by a series of intergovernmental conferences of European ministers in charge of HE at which programmatic declarations and communiqués were passed, beginning with the Sorbonne conference (1998) and continuing through the conferences in Bologna (1999), Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), and Bergen (2005). As national and European policy formulation proceeded in parallel, they influenced each other both ways. At the same time, the analysis of the official conference texts reveals that the decisive features of the European framework for two-cycle degree structures were developed at an early point in time and remained remarkably loose, leaving national actors ample scope for unique designs. If one looks at the accompanying European-level policy discourse however—at seminars, conferences, and particularly at the EUA reports—the picture looks different (Haug et al., 1999; Haug & Tauch, 2001; Reichert & Tauch, 2003, 2005; Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). Here the 3+2-model for the undergraduate and graduate phase played an important role; if only as a reference model to divert from. In the national debates, this discourse was often confused with the official texts, and misunderstandings influenced national decisions.

GERMANY. In Germany, a diverse set of objectives motivated the move to a two-cycle degree structure: using the reform for curricular renewal, reducing drop-out rates, increasing international attractiveness, rendering HE more relevant for the labour market, strengthening non-university HE (*Fachhochschulen)*, and more generally dealing with the massification of HE. While decisive amendment of the HE Act at the federal level was passed in autumn 1998 permitting the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes alongside the traditional degrees on a trial basis, no binding decision for the comprehensive and complete transition to the two-cycle degree structure had been reached by autumn 2004. One reason for this can be found in the federal nature of the German HE system, which led to fragmented policy formulation and decision making, and complicated the development of a national consensus and its implementation into policies. Moreover, the competencies of the federal ministry in charge of HE became increasingly disputed by the *Länder* between 1998 and 2004. This meant that policy formulation was largely dependent on agreement by the 16 *Länder*. While this slowed implementation, decisions were far-reaching as far as the

content of policies was concerned: in line with federal legislation, the Standing Conference of the *Länder* ministries stressed that all Bachelor degrees had to 'qualify for a profession' (*berufsqualifizierend*). Access to the Masters level was generally made selective. *Fachhochschulen* were entitled to offer Masters degrees and to grant the same degree titles as universities. State authorisation of degree programmes was successively replaced by 'accreditation' through agencies in a decentralised structure. These ambitious policies increased the hurdle for a transition to the new model. The overall picture by autumn 1998 can be summarised as a combination of radical policy formulation, low political consensus, and hesitant implementation policy.

THE NETHERLANDS. In the Netherlands the dominant motivation for moving to the 'Bachelor-Master-system', as it was referred to there, was to increase the international transparency and attractiveness of the Dutch degree structure. It was also seen as an opportunity for curricular renewal, but exclusively upon voluntary initiative of HEIs. Dutch non-university HEIs (*hogescholen*) saw the transition as an opportunity for raising their status vis-à-vis the universities, but with limited success. The reform was pushed by the Dutch HEIs, and an intense policy dialogue began in 1998 which culminated in an amendment of the national HE Act in summer 2002. Given the strong interest of HEIs in the reform and the high degree of consensus on the policies passed, implementation was swift and nearly all Dutch HEIs made the transition to the new structure in autumn 2002. The content of policies was not overly ambitious: university Bachelor degrees were not seen as qualifying for the labour market but as transition points to a Masters degree, each university Bachelor graduate was guaranteed a place in at least one Masters programme, *hogescholen* were not publicly funded for Masters programmes, and degree titles for 'academic' and 'higher professional' were kept distinct—though both universities and *hogescholen* were in principle entitled to grant both. The existing peer-review based evaluation system was transformed into an accreditation regime with a central organisation taking a yes/no-decision. Overall, the Dutch situation in autumn 1998 was characterised by moderate to highly ambitious policies, a high degree of political consensus, and swift implementation policy.

FRANCE. Similar to Germany, problem pressure was a strong motivator for the degree reform of the French HE system. A problem perceived as particularly acute by universities and the ministry in charge of HE was the traditional divide between a non-selective university sector and the selective *grandes écoles*. The research-oriented universities were responsible for educating the vast majority of secondary school graduates, while the political and economic elites were trained in the professionally-oriented *grandes écoles*. A major reform aim was to bridge the gap between these sectors. In addition to curricular renewal, fighting dropout, coping with massification, increasing labour-market relevance of university studies, and increasing the international attractiveness of French HE were also important motives. The relevant legal provision was passed in two waves in 1999

and 2002. Given the traditionally strong political resistance to amending the French HE Act, this was done through a series of decrees (*décrets* and *arrêtés*), the first in 1999 supporting initial pioneering adjustments, the second in 2002 providing the regulatory basis for a comprehensive new degree architecture referred to as 'LMD' (*licence, master, doctorat*) including a Bachelor, Masters, and doctoral level. The process was led by the national ministry in charge of HE in close consultation with stakeholders, particularly universities. While resistance from academic staff and student unions was high in international comparison, it was only moderate compared to other French HE reforms. Implementation followed the rhythm of the contract policy between universities and the state, starting with pioneering HEIs in 2002 and reaching nearly complete implementation by autumn 2004. The content of policies was moderately far-reaching: the labour-market orientation of the mainstream Bachelor-level degree at universities (*licence*) was not significantly increased, access to the Masters level was not rendered selective, legal provision promoted a range of curricular reform measures, the reform was largely confined to the university sector and hardly touched the *grandes écoles*, and the existing state authorisation system of degree programmes (*habilitation*) was adjusted to give universities more leeway in designing their own curricula. Overall, the French situation can be characterised by a combination of low to moderately ambitious policies, a moderate level of political consensus, and an implementation policy leading to a high to moderate speed of implementation.

ENGLAND. The English case is special in that its degree system was traditionally organised in a two-cycle structure. When the responsible English minister of state signed the Bologna declaration, she did not expect any major consequences and the event went largely unnoticed by the HE sector. It was only in 2002 that awareness of the Bologna process began to increase. This process was not led by the English ministry in charge of HE however, but by actors such as the university rectors' conference and the funding council. In spring 2003 they created the UK-wide 'High Level Policy Forum' to facilitate the exchange of key sector organisations on European issues, and in January the 'UK HE Europe Unit' which soon became key for coordinating the response of British HE to the Bologna process. While the English HE sector had long been complacent about the Bologna process given that the two-cycle structure was traditional in England, actors now became concerned that continental European trends would put their system under adjustment pressure. A particular worry derived from the fact that most English Masters programmes had traditionally taken one year, while many of the new European Masters programmes were two years in length. Another concern was the trend towards 'programme accreditation' in continental Europe as opposed to the English system of institutional audit. At the same time, English actors worked actively at the European level to shape the future course of the Bologna process. While not triggered by European developments, many English reforms between 1998 and 2004 strongly resonated with efforts of other countries

in the context of the Bologna process such as increasing participation, raising the labour-market relevance of HE (among others by the introduction of a new, two-year 'foundation degree'), and developing a national framework for HE qualifications. Overall, the English HE system underwent significant reform in the period between 1998 and 2004, but only marginal adjustments took place in the context of the Bologna process, with no mentionable change of degree structure.

Comparative analysis

RELATIVE DEGREE OF POLICY CHANGE. Based on a detailed qualitative comparison of institutional starting points for the reforms and policy change until 2004 along the seven dimensions of HE systems, I develop a relative order of the degree of policy change, distinguishing (1) policy formulation on adaptations of national degree structures along the individual dimensions, and (2) national implementation policies in the four countries. The results are summarised in TABLE 1.

From the comparison of policy formulation along the seven dimensions, Germany comes out first, followed by the Netherlands, France, and England. The picture looks very different for implementation policies, which were most advanced in the Netherlands, followed by France and Germany (this aspect does not apply to England as there were no policies on adapting degree structures that could have been implemented). If policy formulation along the seven dimensions and implementation policy are combined into a single overall measure, the Netherlands comes out as the country with the highest overall degree of policy change in the context of the Bologna process; Germany and France share a middle position, and England comes last.

CONVERGENCE. The above analysis also allows me to identify the overall degree of convergence brought about by adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process. The German, Dutch, and French HE systems weakly moved in the direction of the English system, leading to slight convergence.

CAUSAL RECONSTRUCTION. The comparative analysis also includes a detailed analysis of the causal factors behind these reforms that can only be summarised here at a high level of abstraction: indeed all five major explanatory factors put forth in the theoretical framework—(1) actor preferences, (2) perceptions, (3) capabilities, (4) constellations and interaction, and (5) the formal and informal features of the institutional setting—deliver partial explanations. This analysis yielded a complex and nuanced understanding of the nature and degree of policy change, differentiated by dimension. It was also possible to determine cross-dimensional patterns of effect, though it was neither possible nor intended to

determine the relative weight of these factors in causing the overall result. The analysis confirmed my approach of combining institutional and actor perspectives in a single framework. It showed both the importance of the dynamics of actor interaction in the policy formulation and the overwhelming influence of the inherited institutional frameworks on the ultimate result.

Table 1: Overall degree of policy change until 2004

	Germany	The Netherlands	France	England
Dimensional analysis				
Institutional types	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (ML)	4t (L)/(HM*)
Degree structures	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (HM-ML)	4th (L)/(ML*)
Curricular governance	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	1st (H)	3rd (L)/(H*)
Curricula	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	1st (H)	3rd (ML)/(ML*)
Access	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (ML)	4th (L)/(HM*)
Transition to employment	1st (HM)	3rd (L)	2nd (ML)	4th (L)/(ML*)
Funding	2nd (ML)	1st (HM)	3rd (L)	4th (L)/(H*)
Overall I	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	3rd (HM-ML)	4th (L)/(HM*)
Implementation policy	3rd (ML)	1st (H)	2nd (HM)	does not apply
Overall II[a]	2nd (HM)	1st (H-HM)	2nd (HM)	3rd (L)/(HM*)

[a] *Generally, this refers to policy change in relation to adaptations of national degree structures in the context of the Bologna process. For England, both policy change within and outside of the context of the Bologna process is reported, the latter denoted by an asterisk (*). The rank order is based only on policy change within the context of the Bologna process (see also methodological chapter, section 4.4.1). The summative judgement is based on equal weightings of individual dimensions. Similarly, 'Overall I' and 'Implementation policy received equal weight to arrive at 'Overall II'. The rank order does not include a judgement of whether these changes are good or bad. The information in brackets describes the degree of change in qualitative terms: (H) = high, (HM) = high to moderate, (ML)= moderate to low (L) = low.*

Review of hypotheses

As a complement to the detailed qualitative comparative analysis, a review of the four hypotheses serves to check the explanatory power of selected causal relationships implied in the theoretical framework. While the comparative analysis covered both the nature and degree of policy change, the hypotheses

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focus only on the latter. The review of hypotheses also serves as a stylised summary of the empirical findings.

The separate testing of each hypothesis in isolation reveals that—while hypothesis IV is broadly in line with the empirical result—no single factor can fully explain the observed policy change. Therefore, I also reviewed how the explanatory factors work in concert for each HE system. For the sake of brevity, only this holistic assessment is summarised here.

GERMANY. The German situation is characterised by a high degree of polarisation: on the one hand, strong national preferences for change based on acute problem pressure as well as a strong but disputed influence of the international context support a high degree of change. On the other hand, it is restrained by weak capabilities of the national ministry and highly persistent informal and formal constraints. Examples for the latter are widespread attachment to the 'Humboldtian' model of HE, professional entry regulations from the public and the private sector that do not match the new degree structure, and the layered legal provision that follows from the federalist structure. This situation is well reflected in the extreme gap between far-reaching policy change along the seven dimensions and hesitant national decision-making on implementation: the preferences for change fully translate into radical policy formulation justified with reference to international role models. At the same time, the weak national ministry cannot overcome the informal and formal constraints and leaves the implementation question to the *Länder* and HEIs. The *Länder* in turn do not have the capability to substitute the role of the national ministry and only agree on vague formulations regarding implementation. Interestingly, the avoidance of national-decision making on implementation not only slows down change, it also facilitates radical policy formulation in the seven dimensions *per se* because it helps to blur the potential conflict. To sum up, the polarisation between the different causal factors translates into a divided picture of different aspects of policy change, and an intermediate overall position. When seen in conjunction, the four explanatory factors explain the degree of policy change in German HE remarkably well.

FRANCE. In France, the situation is polarised in a different way. Strong preferences for change based on severe national problem pressure and strong capabilities of the national ministry (which does however not extend to the grandes écoles) support change in the university sector. At the same time informal and formal constraints—such as egalitarian values deeply enshrined in French society, and as close linkages between HE degrees and employment prospects in Germany— make it difficult. The informal constraints translate into a high degree of resistance from several national actors in HE policy. International role models are an important argument of the ministry, and the belief that the transition to two-cycle degree structures (referred to as LMD in France) is needed to remain internationally competitive is an important motive for the universities to engage in the reform. But these international perceptions do not influence the logic of

national reforms very deeply. It is the confrontation of strong problem pressure in France—and consequently high preferences for change of the ministry and the representative organisation of universities—as well as strong government capabilities faced with strong formal and informal constraints, that constitutes the main polarity. The degree of policy change in France can indeed be largely explained by the interplay of these forces. In some dimensions, the national ministry manages to overcome informal barriers to change—such as the egalitarian values behind the system of national curriculum frameworks in the case of curricular governance—so that its preferences are translated into far-reaching policy formulation. In others—such as the relationship of universities and *grandes écoles*—it achieves little. In the case of the *grandes écoles*, it is also weak capabilities of the ministry that consistently translate into a low degree of change. Regarding implementation policy, the fact that the entire reform is formalised in terms of decrees rather than change of law is a tribute by the ministry to the strong formal barriers to change. The sequenced implementation policy relies on a mixture of persuasion, public pressure, and voluntarism, which was consciously chosen by the ministry to maximise the degree of informal change possible under these difficult conditions. It thus reflects both the strong capabilities of the ministry and its concessions to informal constraints. Overall, it is mainly the persistence of formal *and* informal constraints—such as the deeply enshrined gap between universities and *grandes écoles*, the attachment to egalitarian values in the university sector, and the important role of regulations in the public and private sector tying employment opportunities to degrees—that prevent more policy change in the case of France. To conclude, the four explanatory factors in concert explain a great deal of the policy change in the French HE system.

THE NETHERLANDS. In the case of the Netherlands, the fairly high adaptations brought about in most dimensions can also be explained by a combination of the four factors. The national ministry's relatively strong capabilities to steer national policy formulation, a widespread readiness to accept international role models, and a relatively low persistence of formal constraints—as exemplified by the relative ease to adapt the National HE Act and the low importance of professional entry regulations—provide very favourable conditions for policy change. But as national problem pressure is small, so are the predominant preferences for change derived from the national context. Also, informal constraints—notably the quite deeply established gap between universities and *hogescholen* as well as attachment to egalitarian values in education—show a certain degree of persistence that cannot be 'negotiated away' by the ministry. The latter two factors—low national problem pressure and persistence of informal constraints—slightly reduce the degree of possible change, but the overall degree of policy change is nevertheless quite high. The constellation also allows for a high degree of congruence between policy formulation along the seven dimensions and implementation policy. Compared with Germany and France, the Dutch situation

is much less conflict-ridden and polarised, as pressure for change and capability for change coincide to a much higher degree than in the other two countries. Overall, the four explanatory factors in conjunction capture the Dutch policy change well; although the high overall degree of policy change remains somewhat surprising given the low national problem pressure.

ENGLAND. The verdict on the English case is more nuanced. Generally speaking, moderate preferences for change derived from the national institutional context and a high influence of the international context on actor perceptions were supportive of policy change. The same holds for strong informal capabilities of the ministry to organise the national policy formulation process, low persistence of formal constraints exemplified by the low importance of legal regulation for many areas of HE, and the relative ease of changing law in a majoritarian democracy. This explains the high to moderate level of overall policy change in the English HE system quite well. However, things are different with respect to policy change in the context of the Bologna process. As England already had a two-cycle degree structure, the option to use the introduction of such structures as a lever for policy change in other dimensions was not available. Smaller adjustments of the two-cycle degree structure with a view to European compatibility, such as the length of the Masters phase, the use of modularisation and credits etc., as well as adjustments in dimensions such as curricular governance, would nevertheless have been imaginable. Here, another factor comes into play: although the general influence of the international context on actor perceptions is high, the readiness to accept European role models is low and most actors perceive the Bologna process as a threat rather than an opportunity. In a nutshell, actors do not conceptualise their preferences for change in the context of the Bologna process, and change takes place outside of that context. International perceptions thus play a fundamentally different role in English policy formulation on the Bologna process than they do in other countries. English actors generally do not use the Bologna process as a lever for national change. Rather than fostering change, the widespread Euro-scepticism among English actors in HE policy thus constitutes an informal constraint to change in the context of the Bologna process. As a compounding factor, the English ministry in charge of HE has not taken the lead in organising the response to the Bologna process, although it did so in other policy areas during the same period. This translates into weak capabilities of the ministry with regard to Bologna in practice. The unique institutional starting point of the English HE system in conjunction with the different role of international perceptions in English policy formulation on the Bologna process and the weak capabilities of the ministry in this regard, explain the low degree of change in this context. For the English case, the four factors in conjunction also explain the policy output with respect to Bologna, but only if a positive attitude to European cooperation is added to strong perceptions of the international context as a moderating variable.

When analysed simultaneously, the four explanatory factors captured in the individual hypotheses can explain a great deal of the observed policy change in the four HE systems. While the individual hypotheses are only partially supported on the basis of bivariate correlations, the overall model is useful to summarise and explain national outcomes and international differences in policy change. For an overview, the analysis of this section is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Effect of four explanatory factors on policy change[a]

	Germany	Netherlands	France	England
National preferences and problem pressure	++	+	++	- (+*)
Formal constraints / informal constraints	--/--	++/-	--/--	++/-- (++/-*)
Perceptions of international context	++	++	+	-- (+*)
Capabilities of the national ministry	--	++	++	-- (+*)
Policy change along seven dimensions	H	HM	HM-ML	L (HM*)
Implementation policy	ML	H	HM	does not apply
Overall policy change	HM	H-HM	HM	L (HM*)

[a] *This refers to policy change in the context of adaptations of degree structures in the course of the Bologna process. For England, the results with respect to general policy change i.e., independent of the Bologna process, are added in parentheses and denoted with an asterisk (*).The judgements on the degree of policy change are drawn from Table 10.1. 7. ++ = positive effect, + = weakly positive effect, -- = negative effect, - = weakly negative effect. H = high, HM = high to moderate, ML = moderate to low, L = low.*

Discussion of results

I would like to highlight two overarching findings in relation to the explanatory factors that seem of particular relevance for policy. The first concerns the relationship between actor preferences derived from the national institutional setting and actor perceptions of the international context (hypotheses I and II). The second is about the role of capabilities of the national ministry in charge of HE in overcoming informal constraints (hypotheses III and IV).

NATIONAL PREFERENCES AND INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTIONS. In the theoretical framework I assigned a key role to the perception of the international context as the factor that could potentially overcome national informal constraints and thus

allow for a higher degree of policy change than predicted by North's original model. The analysis has shown that actor perceptions of the international context did indeed support national policy change, but only in conjunction with national preferences. Perceptions of the international context were often used to legitimate and support national preferences; they occasionally also provided their base. Their legitimating power—e.g., in the form of role models derived from other HE systems—was extremely high and they were rarely questioned. Perceptions of the international context had a strong re-enforcing effect on national change through these mechanisms. Preferences and perceptions conditioned and reinforced each other mutually. In the terms of path dependence theory, international perceptions did indeed lead to positive feedback loops and lock-in, and help explain why such a high degree of change in HE systems could be achieved in a relatively short period of time. But national preferences remain the *conditio sine qua non* for national change. I also found that the perceptions of the international context were often selective and therefore biased, sometimes wrong, and strongly differed between national HE systems. While the subjectivity of these perceptions is fully in line with the new institutionalist assumptions and therefore not surprising, the finding is nevertheless highly relevant in the context of the Bologna process. In conjunction with the voluntary nature of the entire process and the strong degree to which it was driven by national interest, it helps to explain why national HE systems did not converge more clearly to a common model.

CAPABILITIES OF THE NATIONAL MINISTRY AND INFORMAL CONSTRAINTS. Another important result concerns the role of the national ministries responsible for HE in overcoming informal constraints. My analysis revealed that—whether the respective national ministry had the formal capability to do so—new regulation was never passed without prior consultation of stakeholders in each of the four countries. Where it was formally possible it was still politically unfeasible, and where it was politically feasible the respective ministries still chose to consult stakeholders. National policy formulation on the Bologna process in all the countries could be described as a variety of "negotiation in the shadow of hierarchy". The hierarchical element was strongest in France, followed by the Netherlands, Germany, and lastly England. I also found that the quality of national policy formulation—in terms of its chances for successful implementation—crucially depended on the ability of the national ministry to organise and lead a national reform dialogue. This in turn hinged on its strategic leadership, which was more important than its formal ability to initiate and pass regulation.

Linking this to the discussion on the gap between policy formulation in the seven dimensions and implementation policy, the latter can largely be explained by the different capabilities of national ministries to effectively organise the national coordination and negotiation of interests. In France and the Netherlands, this capability was of a different nature, but similarly high. As a result, the

regulatory change ultimately enacted in both countries was based on a high degree of consensus among the national actors, meaning that formal and informal policy change largely went hand in hand—in the Netherlands even more than in France. The English and German national ministries did not possess a similarly unquestioned authority. In Germany this was due to the federalist system and in England to the tradition of university autonomy particularly in the area of degrees. Moreover, for a long time the English ministry did not assume a leadership role in the Bologna process even to the extent it could have. As a result, the organisation of a systematic national debate was impeded in both countries. In Germany, this resulted in the described implementation gap, in England in the slow response to the Bologna process.

Concluding reflections

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. This study makes three major contributions to the advancement of the theoretical understanding of HE policy and policy analysis in general. First, it integrates elements from North's theory of institutional change and Scharpf and Mayntz' actor-centred institutionalism into a common framework suited to explain policy change in the course of the Bologna process. Second, it is one of the few that consistently applies actor-centred institutionalism to a policy field. Finally, it links the scholarly analysis of the Bologna process back to the existing tradition in comparative HE research by demonstrating how it relates to the perennial issues of HE research and reform

Empirically, the national case studies give the first in-depth reconstruction of the respective policy formulation processes in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England. This study is also the first to systematically make the content of the original policy documents and the national debates in the four HE systems internationally accessible. By guiding the analysis with a common theoretical framework, it is one of the few studies of the Bologna process that allows for systematic comparison. The analysis also helps to contextualise the reforms and provides the basis for understanding the further development of the Bologna process in the next few years. Finally, the study could be of interest to HE researchers studying other reforms in cross-national perspective as it provides general insights into how national policy formulation in HE is conditioned by the national institutional setting and actor capabilities.

REFLECTION OF THEORY AND METHODOLOGY. Overall, combining the institution- and actor-centred perspectives turned out to be indispensable for capturing the nature of the Bologna process, and the frameworks of North and Scharpf proved compatible and complementary. Challenges arose from the overlap between some concepts from the two frameworks and the complexity of the analytical toolkit. Moreover, the choice to focus on the interaction of organisational rather than individual actors was a limitation, as it did not always allow me to do justice

to the important contribution of certain individuals in the process. However, from a birds-eye view, this research perspective captures the main actor positions and the dynamics of national policy formulation processes remarkably well. The timing of the study can also be seen as a limitation, as it was too early to evaluate policy implementation and policy change is still ongoing. However, the study illuminates important driving forces and trends that will retain their validity even if the concrete details of policy outputs are still subject to modification.

AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH. Some of the theoretical perspectives combined in the framework of this study could be individually pursued in more depth in further studies. Examples include the interaction of formal and informal institutions in the change process, national actor constellations and interaction in selected policy arenas, and the different forms of path dependence. Similarly, some of the thematic dimensions included in this study merit more detailed analysis. Future case studies or cross-country comparisons could focus on the implications of adaptations of degree structures for selected dimensions of HE systems, such as access to the Masters level or the relationship between different types of HEIs. Another set of research ideas relates to ways to expand or shift the scope of this study, especially to the Nordic countries, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean. To complement the theoretical perspective assumed in this study, it would be worthwhile to focus on the role of individuals and personal networks in the policy formulation processes at national and European levels. In a few years' time, the study could be complemented thematically by additional lenses on the Bologna process, such as the effect of adaptations of degree structures on the nexus between teaching and research, and the mutual recognition of credits and degrees, and student mobility. Particularly recognition and mobility are highly relevant from a political perspective as they are the core rationale for seeking the convergence of HE systems. Finally, with the groundwork of an understanding of policy change laid by this study, a number of implementation studies are the way forward in a few years time.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS. This study has deliberately not assumed a normative stance, and has taken a policy-analysis perspective rather than undertaking implementation research. Nevertheless, at this point a few normative thoughts seem merited. The following lessons could be relevant for policy makers in making the Bologna process work at the system level, as well as for staff at the level of HEIs.

The first lesson is the need to deepen the mutual understanding between policy makers from different national backgrounds on how Bologna reforms in their partner countries are bound by the respective national context. Failure to understand the institutional heritage of partner countries can lead to misunderstandings and misguided national policies—assuming that European convergence is aimed at. The next implication is that European policy dialogue in HE needs to be intensified and the according networks extended. Also a the highest political level, re-establishing international dialogue and maintaining its

continuity is needed for the shared aims of the Bologna process to remain in focus.

The international policy dialogue can most fruitfully be intensified in areas where national differences are strong and potentially hinder the attainment of the shared Bologna goals. There are five areas in which such intensified dialogue and coordination is particularly needed: the transition from secondary school to HE, the nature of the first degree, the research base of Masters programmes, doctoral education, and the art of policy-making in HE itself.

In the absence of clear recipes for significantly increasing the degree of convergence between European HE systems in the near future, I propose an alternative perspective on the question of recognition and mobility, namely to think afresh about targeted measures to improve recognition and mobility in the face of a certain degree of persistent diversity of national HE systems. Such efforts could forestall the looming danger of 'provincialisation' of the Bologna reforms and give fresh impetus to the worthwhile vision that our children will one day move more freely and more easily within Europe—both as students and as knowledge workers—than has so far been possible for us.

Korte Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Achtergrond

Toen de vier ministers verantwoordelijk voor hoger onderwijs (HO) van Frankrijk, Duitsland, Italië en het Verenigd Koninkrijk een ontmoeting hadden op de Sorbonne Universiteit in Parijs in Mei 1998 om een gezamenlijke declaratie te tekenen over de harmonisatie van de architectuur van het Europese hoger onderwijs systeem (Sorbonne declaratie, 1998) anticipeerde niemand dat ze een van de meest vergaande Europese HO hervormingen in beweging zouden zetten, een hervorming die sindsdien bekend is geworden als het " Bolognaproces".

In Juni 1999, slechts een jaar later, onderschreven 29 Europese ministers verantwoordelijk voor hoger onderwijs vergelijkbare doelstellingen. Als ondertekenaars van de "Bologna declaratie" spraken zij hun intentie uit tot de creatie van een "Europese hoger onderwijsruimte" en een betere aansluiting en vergelijkbaarheid van hoger onderwijssystemen, met als doel de promotie van de mobiliteit en arbeidsmarktpositie van burgers en het versterken van de internationale concurrentiepositie van het Europese hoger onderwijssysteem vis-à-vis de rest van de wereld (Bologna declaratie, 1999).

In 2006, zijn 45 Europese landen binnen en buiten de Europese Unie (EU) bij het proces betrokken. Hervormingen van nationale HO systemen zijn in heel Europa aan de gang.

Het Bolognaproces is opmerkelijk om een aantal redenen, vooral de snelheid, de geografische omvang en de hoeveelheid en diepgang van de nationale HO hervormingen die onder deze vlag schuilgaan. Bovendien, hoewel de Europese integratie voortdurend toenam in veel gebieden voornamelijk in de sfeer van de economie, was onderwijsbeleid lange tijd een puur nationale aangelegenheid. Europese nationale overheden hadden in het verleden bewust en succesvol hun onderwijssystemen verdedigd tegen invloed van de EU en tegen elke poging tot 'harmonisatie' zoals uitgedrukt in Artikel 126 (149) van het verdrag van Maastricht (Amsterdam). Tegen deze achtergrond is de plotselinge bereidheid en interesse van Europese ministers verantwoordelijk voor HO om samenwerking te vergroten en hun hoger onderwijssystemen meer vergelijkbaar te maken een historische stap.

Vanuit een onderzoeksperspectief is het proces interessant omdat de vele dubbelzinnigheden tot een uiterst complexe dynamiek leiden: hoewel het proces bewust buiten de context van de EU was opgezet en al snel HO systemen binnen en buiten de EU omvatte, resoneert het proces sterk met de doelstellingen en activiteiten van de EU en is het steeds meer verweven met EU processen.

Bovendien, omdat het gaat om een niet bindende intentieverlaring van nationale ministers verantwoordelijk voor HO, is de implementatie fase uiterst belangrijk. Implemenatie in de context van het Bolognaproces hangt af van de interactie van nationale actoren in HO beleid en is dus onderhevig aan de invloed van de diverse nationale belangen, prioriteiten, beleidsprocessen, etc.

Onderzoeksfocus en benadering

Om de ambitieuze doelstellingen uit de Bologna declaratie te bereiken spraken de ministers zes zogenaamde 'action lines' af. Eén van de meest vergaande is de tweede die voorziet in het aannemen van een systeem dat in essentie gebaseerd is op twee cycli, 'undergraduate' en 'graduate' (Bologna declaratie, 1999). De vertaling van dit doel in nationaal beleid is het onderzoeksobject van deze studie.

Een systeem gebaseerd op twee cycli was nieuw voor de meeste HO systemen, die historisch een grote diversiteit laten zien. De meeste systemen kenden universitaire studies met één lange cyclus, leidend tot een graad op 'Master' niveau. Veel hoger onderwijssystemen hadden daarnaast een niet universitaire hoger onderwijstype dat leidde tot een graad beneden dat niveau. De ontwikkeling richting een structuur met twee cycli betekende dat deze systemen getransformeerd moesten worden in wat met de uitwisselbare termen 'bachelor' en 'master', ' graduate' en 'undergraduate', eerste en tweede graad of een twee lagen structuur wordt aangeduid.

De hervorming van nationale gradenstructuren is niet alleen vergaand omdat het raakt aan diepgewortelde onderwijstradities, maar ook omdat het onmogelijk is om het graden systeem aan te passen zonder belangrijke aanpassingen aan andere dimensie van nationale HO systemen. De doelstelling had ook effecten op de weinige landen die hun HO systemen al in twee cycli hadden georganiseerd en die werden geconfronteerd met de vraag naar de aansluiting en vergelijkbaarheid met andere landen.

Hoewel niet alle hervormingen kunnen worden toegeschreven aan het Bolognaproces en deze in sommige landen werden geïnitieerd vóór de Sorbonne en Bologna declaraties wordt sindsdien een groot deel van de hervormingen gecoördineerd binnen het raamwerk van het Bolognaproces. Deze studie bestudeert hervormingen op het gebied van de graden structuur dus in de context van het Bolognaproces.

Naast het in kaart brengen van deze aanpassingen en veranderingen op de relevante dimensies van hoger onderwijs systemen, is deze studie gericht op de vraag of er een convergentie plaatsvindt van nationale HO systemen. Hoewel de term 'convergentie' niet genoemd wordt in de Sorbonne en Bologna declaraties is dit duidelijk het 'leitmotif' van zowel beide declaraties als het Bolognaproces. The hoeveelheid convergentie en de dimensies waarop convergentie plaatsvindt blijven echter ambigu. In termen van de adoptie van een twee cycli systeem is

slechts vastgelegd dat de eerste cyclus minimaal drie jaar lang is en relevant moet zijn voor de Europese arbeidsmarkt en dat de tweede cyclus moet leiden tot een 'master' of 'doctor' graad (Bolognadeclaratie , 1999). Omdat dit zal plaatsvinden met volledig respect voor de diversiteit van culturen, talen, nationale onderwijs systemen en de autonomie van instellingen (Bologna declaration, 1999; see also De Wit & Verhoeven, 2001; Verbruggen, 2002) is deze studie geïnteresseerd in de vraag hoe de resulterende spanning tussen convergentie en divergentie (zie Meek, Goedegebuure, Kivinen & Rinnen, 1996; Teichler, 1988) een rol speelt bij het vertalen van de Bologna declaratie in nationaal beleid.

Onderzoeksvragen

Gebaseerd op deze initiële overwegingen is deze studie gericht op hervormingen op nationaal niveau bestudeerd met behulp van een internationale comparatieve benadering waarin nationale gradenstructuren in de context van andere relevante dimensies van nationale HO systemen wordt bestudeerd en de convergentie tussen landen wordt geanalyseerd. Deze studie richt zich op drie onderzoeksvragen:

(1) Hoe zijn de nationale gradenstructuren aangepast in de context van het Bolognaproces en welke veranderingen impliceert dit voor andere relevante dimensies van de verschillende HO systemen?
(2) Wat verklaart de aard en mate van veranderingen in de verschillende HO systemen en de overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen deze systemen?
(3) Leidt de aanpassing van nationale gradenstructuren in de context van het Bolognaproces tot convergentie van de verschillende HO systemen?

Theoretisch raamwerk

Gebaseerd op relevante literatuur op het gebied van HO onderzoek, implementatie onderzoek, beleidsonderzoek en 'new institutionalism', heb ik de volgende definiërende keuzes gemaakt: om convergentie niet als een absolute staat, maar als een proces te definiëren; om geen implementatie analyse te gebruiken maar een combinatie van actor en institutioneel georiënteerde perspectieven en om rekenschap te geven van de 'muli-actor, multi-level' aard van modern HO bestuur. Ten slotte heb ik geprobeerd een raamwerk te ontwikkelen dat het mogelijk maakte de twee vormen van 'path dependency' te analyseren die ik in de literatuur aantrof, één die de continuïteit, permanentie en inertie benadrukt (Goodin, 1996; Pierson, 1993, 2000b; Weir & Skocpol, 1985) en een andere die zich richt op 'critical junctures', 'feedback loops' en 'lock-in' (Arthur, 1994; Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

In het licht van deze overwegingen, heb ik een theoretisch raamwerk ontwikkeld dat gebaseerd is op elementen van het model van institutionele

verandering van Douglas North (1990), het perspectief van 'actor-centred institutionalism' (ACI) ontwikkeld door Renate Mayntz en Fritz Scharpf (1997) en HO onderzoek. Het raamwerk omvat twee elementen en hun interactie: instituties – hier: de institutionele setting van nationale HO systemen – en actoren – hier: de organisationele actoren in nationaal HO beleid. Actoren worden beïnvloed door de institutionele context waarin zij opereren maar brengen ook institutionele verandering voort. Hoewel North belangrijk was voor het ontwikkelen van de causale relaties, heeft ACI geholpen een gedetailleerdere representatie te geven van de dynamiek van de fase van beleidsformulering die het resultaat is van de interactie tussen verschillende actoren. Dit theoretische raamwerk is weergegeven in de volgende figuur.

Figuur 1: Theoretisch raamwerk

Europese institutionele context van het Bologna proces
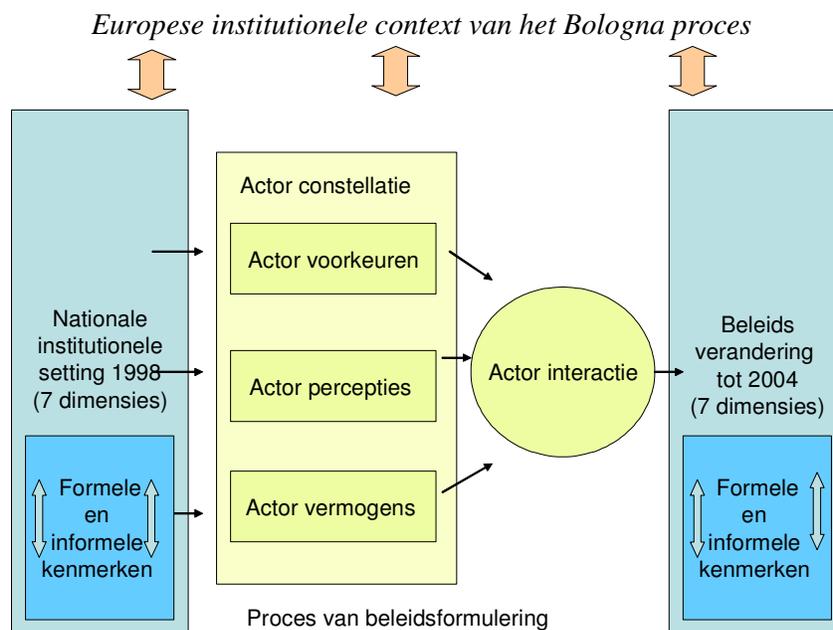
Het raamwerk vormt een analytische lens om de institutionele setting van nationale HO systemen in 1998 en de beleidsveranderingen tot 2004 te analyseren. Bovendien vormt het raamwerk een kader om de participanten en dynamiek van het proces van beleidsformulering te bestuderen die de veranderingen tussen de twee momenten verklaart. De belangrijkste elementen in het raamwerk zijn:

(1) De institutionele kant, met andere woorden, de nationale institutionele setting in 1998, beleidsverandering tot 2004 en hun formele en informele kenmerken geanalyseerd op zeven dimensies.
(2) De actor kant, met andere woorden, de actor constellaties (voorkeuren, percepties en vermogens) en hun interacties in het proces van beleidsformulering. Het gaat hier om organisationele, niet om individuele actoren.

DE INSTITUTIONELE KANT. North volgend (1990: 3) gebruik ik een ruime opvatting van instituties: de regels van het spel in een samenleving , of formeler, de door mensen ontwikkelde belemmeringen die het menselijk gedrag vormgeven. Net als North maak ik onderscheid tussen twee typen instituties: formele belemmeringen zoals wettelijke bepalingen, statuten en contracten en informele belemmeringen zoals sociaal gesanctioneerde gedragsnormen, intern afgedwongen gedragstandaarden en conventies (ibid: 40). Informele instituties zijn onderdeel van de cultuur; culturele kenmerken van samenlevingen zoals tradities en overgeërfde normen en waarden zijn dus onderdeel van dit concept van instituties. Formele en informele instituties beïnvloeden elkaar, wetten bijvoorbeeld reflecteren vaak algemeen geaccepteerde normen en waarden en als ze worden aangepast leiden ze tot een druk op de informele belemmeringen om mee te veranderen. Hoewel het feit dat deze aanpassingen tijd kosten, vaak resulterend in inertie, kan radicale verandering optreden als een 'representational redescription' van de mentale kaart van actoren plaatsvindt en daarmee een verandering van de informele belemmeringen (Denzau & North, 1994) (22-23). Bij North gebeurt dit allen tijdens oorlogen en revoluties. Ik breid dit model uit naar de blootstelling van actoren aan een internationale context als een factor die kan leiden tot 'representational redescription' en dus tot verandering van informele instituties. Bovendien, neem ik de mogelijkheid in overweging dat de nationale context zelf prikkels biedt die tot institutionele verandering kunnen leiden. Toegepast op het Bolognaproces, leidt dit tot de empirische vraag welke krachten zullen domineren: inertie door een combinatie van formele en informele belemmeringen of radicale verandering door blootstelling aan een internationale context of van nationale prikkels tot verandering?

Omdat het te vroeg is om de implementatie van de Bolognahervormingen systematisch op het niveau van individuele HO instellingen te bestuderen concentreer ik deze studie op een analyse van beleidsverandering als een aspect en een vorm van institutionele verandering. Ook beleidsverandering, vereist het overwinnen van zowel de informele belemmeringen, zoals het overtuigen van nationale actoren om normen, waarden en gedragswijzen gelieerd aan de overerfde institutionele setting te veranderen, en de formele belemmeringen, bijvoorbeeld door wetten aan te passen.

Om de analyse van de nationale institutionele contexten te structureren heb ik zeven dimensies gedefinieerd, naast nationale gradenstructuren: de relatie tussen

de verschillende types HO instellingen; besluitvorming over curricula; curricula; toegang; transitie van HO naar de arbeidsmarkt en financiering. Ieder van deze dimensies bevat formele en informele kenmerken. Hoewel, bijvoorbeeld gradenstructuren vastliggen in HO wetgeving en instellingsstatuten, zijn ze op hetzelfde moment een reflectie van wijd gedeelde percepties van wat nodig is om een bepaalde rol in de samenleving te vervullen of een bepaald beroep uit te oefenen.

DE ACTOR KANT. Van Mayntz en Scharpf gebruik ik de concepten voor een gedetailleerdere analyse van de actor kant van het raamwerk, namelijk actor constellatie en actor interactie. De actor constellatie bestaat uit de vermogens, percepties en voorkeuren van alle relevante actoren en wordt beïnvloed door de institutionele setting.

Het concept 'vermogens' verwijst naar alle middelen die een actor kan gebruiken om uitkomsten in bepaalde aspecten en in een bepaalde mate te beïnvloeden (Scharpf, 1997). Voorbeelden van vermogens zijn de competenties en de rollen van actoren die door wetten, statuten en overerfde relaties gedefinieerd zijn, maar ook hun financiële bronnen en hun personeel. Percepties refereren naar de cognitieve oriëntaties van actoren, oftewel hun subjectieve opvattingen over de werkelijkheid – inclusief feiten en causale relaties – die correct kunnen maar niet hoeven zijn. Voorkeuren beschrijven een scala aan typen van belangen en doelen inclusief puur eigenbelang, de voorkeuren afgeleid van organisatiedoelen, missies (of de normatieve belemmeringen gedefinieerd door het doel van een organisatie), en de specifieke belangen en normen die een bepaalde actor kies op basis van de 'corporate identity' of cultuur .

Waar de actor constellatie een statisch beeld geeft van de relaties van de actoren rond een voorgesteld beleid, is de actor interactie gericht op de dynamiek rond het beleid. Dit concept specificeert hoe conflicten worden opgelost – eenzijdige acties, onderhandelen, stemmen of hiërarchische besluitvorming (Scharpf, 1998: 72). De meest frequente interactie wijzen in HO beleid zijn onderhandeling, hiërarchische besluitvorming of een combinatie van beide: 'onderhandelingen in de schaduw van de hiërarchie' (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995). Deze laatste vorm is een frequente interactie wijze in HO beleid, waar de condities voor het uitonderhandelen van een consensus verbeterd worden door de dreiging van eenzijdige besluitvorming door het ministerie verantwoordelijk voor HO.

Ik gebruik dit theoretische raamwerk op twee manieren: (1) als een gids voor de nationale casestudies en de comparatieve analyse, en (2) om licht te werpen op een beperkt aantal specifieke causale relaties door middel van een set *hypothesen*.

Hypothesen

Terwijl de casestudies een kwalitatieve analyse geven van de aard van de hervormingen, proberen de hypothesen de mate van beleidsverandering in HO systemen te verklaren. De eerste drie hypothesen focussen op belangrijke aspecten van de actor constellatie, namelijk de voorkeuren (I) de percepties (II) en de vermogens (III) om de mate van beleidsverandering te verklaren. De vierde hypothese richt zich op het effect van de initiële institutionele setting op de mate van beleidsverandering:

(I) Des te meer de nationale institutionele setting de preferenties van actoren voor verandering ondersteunt…
(II) Des te meer de percepties van actoren in een HO systeem worden beïnvloed door de internationale context…
(III) Des te groter de vermogens van de nationale ministeries verantwoordelijk voor HO in de verschillende HO systemen….
(IV) Des te minder hardnekkig de informele en formele belemmeringen van nationale HO systemen…

… des te meer beleidsverandering zal plaatsvinden.

Figuur 2: Grafische weergave van de hypothesen
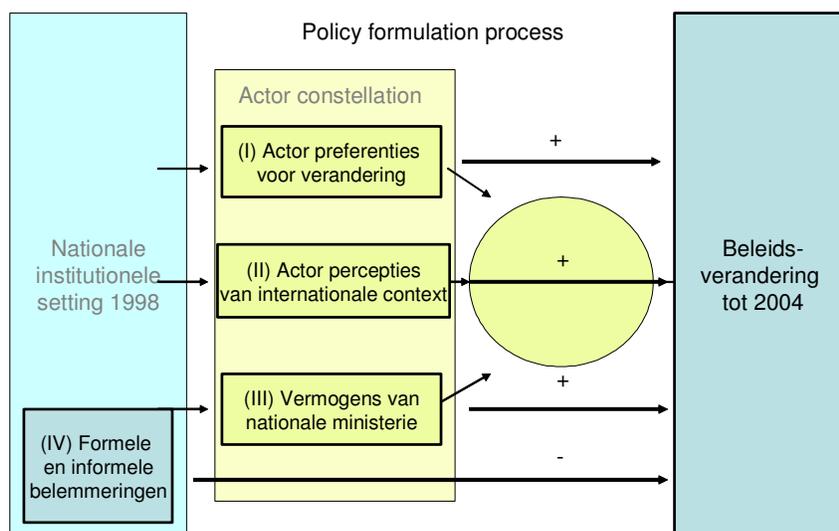
Methodologie

Vier nationale case studies van Duitsland, Nederland, Frankrijk en Engeland, tussen 1998 en 2004, vormen het hart van het empirische deel van deze studie. Duitsland, Frankrijk en Engeland zijn gekozen vanwege het feit dat zij de drie belangrijkste Europese universitaire modellen vertegenwoordigen: het Humboldtiaanse, het Napoleontische en het Angel-Saxische model (Neave, 2001). De Engelse case speelt een dubbele rol in het Bolognaproces, zowel als een participant en als een referentiepunt voor de twee cycli structuur. Nederland combineert elementen van de Humboldtiaanse, Napoleontische en Angel-Saxische modellen, maar is voornamelijk opgenomen omdat het land een vooruitstrevende rol heeft gespeeld in HO hervorming in Europa. De periode waarover de analyse zich uitstrekt begint in het jaar van de Sorbonne conferentie en eindigt op het laatste moment van dataverzameling in de herfst van 2004.

Het onderzoeksdesign beantwoord de onderzoeksvragen in drie stappen, in toenemende mate van abstractie. Ten eerste, het in kaart brengen van de aanpassingen van de gradenstructuren in de vier landen (vraag 1). Ten tweede, een vergelijkende analyse van verschillen en overeenkomsten in verandering tussen de nationale HO systemen (vraag 2) en het bepalen van de mate van convergentie (vraag 3). Ten derde, het 'testen' van belangrijke elementen in het onderliggende theoretische raamwerk op de mate waarin ze de mate van beleidsverandering kunnen verklaren.

De nationale case studies vallen in drie onderdelen uiteen: het eerste deel brengt de "actoren en hun vermogens" en de "institutionele setting in 1998" in beeld, het tweede brengt het "proces van beleidsformulering" in beeld en de derde de "beleidsverandering tot 2004". De zeven dimensies worden gebruikt om de analyse van zowel de institutionele setting als de beleidsverandering te structureren. In het vergelijkende hoofdstuk worden de dimensies ook gebruikt om de vergelijking van institutionele setting en beleidsverandering te systematiseren. Gegeven de diepgaande methodologische problemen bij het benaderen van quasi-statistische methoden met behulp van een casestudie design (Lijphart, 1971; Mayntz, 2002; Peters, 1998; Scharpf, 1997, 2000) zal het 'testen' van de hypothesen in alle bescheidenheid plaatsvinden. De hypothesen worden meer gebruikt als een manier om de analyse te focussen dan als statistische test.

Voor deze studie is data uit primaire en secundaire bronnen gebruikt, de meeste data was kwalitatief van aard. Het hart van de data wordt gevormd door interviews met 95 experts en actoren in de vier landen en de analyse van de originele beleidsdocumenten. HO literatuur, kwantitatieve data en participerende observatie waren daarnaast belangrijke databronnen.

Comparatieve analyse

Een belangrijk deel van deze studie bestaat uit gedetailleerde en rijke casestudies van beleidsverandering in de context van het Bolognaproces in Duitsland, Nederland, Frankrijk en Engeland. Het samenvatten van deze casestudies zou ze reduceren tot oppervlakkige analyses. Hier is bewust gekozen om de casestudies niet weer te geven, maar alleen de conclusies van de comparatieve analyse en de hypothesen kort te beschrijven.

RELATIEVE MATE VAN BELEIDSVERANDERING. Gebaseerd op een gedetailleerde vergelijking van de institutionele uitgangspositie in 1998 en de beleidsverandering tot 2004 langs de zeven dimensies in de vier casestudies kan een rangorde in de mate van beleidsverandering worden vastgesteld. Daarbij maak ik een onderscheid tussen beleidsformulering wat betreft de aanpassingen van nationale gradenstructuren langs de individuele dimensies en nationaal implementatiebeleid in de vier landen.

Gebaseerd op de mate van beleidsverandering gemeten op de zeven dimensies zijn de meeste veranderingen in Duitsland, gevolgd door Nederland, Frankrijk en ten slotte Engeland. Dit beeldt veranderd als gekeken wordt naar implementatiebeleid, hier was Nederland het meest vooruit, gevolgd door Frankrijk en Duitsland (Engeland is hier niet relevant omdat er geen beleid op het gebied van aanpassing van gradenstructuren was geformuleerd en dat dus ook niet kon worden geïmplementeerd). Als de twee benaderingen worden gecombineerd in één schaal, komt Nederland uit de bus als het land met de grootste mate van beleidsverandering in het kader van het Bolognaproces, gevolgd door Duitsland en Frankrijk in middenposities en Engeland met de minste beleidsverandering.

CONVERGENTIE. Deze analyse stelt me in staat de hoeveelheid convergentie in nationale gradenstructuren vast te stellen die als een gevolg van het Bolognaproces gerealiseerd is. De Duitse, Nederlandse en Franse HO systemen bewegen een beetje in de richting van het Engelse systeem, leidend tot een lichte convergentie.

CAUSALE RECONSTRUCTIE. De comparatieve analyse bevatte ook een gedetailleerde analyse van de causale factoren achter deze hervormingen die hier alleen op een hoog abstractieniveau gereconstrueerd kunnen worden. Alle vijf verklaringen in het theoretische raamwerk: actor voorkeuren, percepties, vermogens, constellaties en interactie en ten slotte de formele en informele kenmerken van de institutionele setting leveren partiële verklaringen. De analyse leverde een complex en genuanceerd begrip op van de aard en mate van beleidsverandering uitgesplitst per dimensie. Het was ook mogelijk de invloedspatronen over de dimensies heen vast te stellen. Hoewel het niet mogelijk (en ook niet beoogd) was om het relatieve gewicht van de verschillende factoren vast te stellen. De analyse bevestigde mijn aanpak waarbij institutionele en actor benaderingen in één model werden samengebracht. Het liet zowel het

belang van de dynamiek van de interactie tussen actoren zien en de overweldigende invloed van overgeërfde institutionele raamwerken op de het uiteindelijke resultaat.

Analyse van de hypothesen

Complementair aan de gedetailleerde case studies wordt de analyse van de hypothesen gebruikt om de verklaringskracht te testen van een beperkt aantal causale relaties die op basis van het theoretisch raamwerk verwacht worden. Dit overzicht van de uitkomsten van deze analyse vormt tegelijkertijd een gestileerde samenvatting van de empirische resultaten.

Het in isolatie testen van ieder van de hypothesen laat zien dat, hoewel hypothese IV in grote lijnen in overeenstemming is met de empirische uitkomsten, geen enkele hypothese op zichzelf de geobserveerde beleidsverandering kan verklaren. Daarom is een analyse gemaakt van de manier waarop de verschillende factoren gezamenlijk beleidsverandering kunnen verklaren in ieder van de casestudies. Kortheidshalve is alleen deze 'holistische' analyse hier weergegeven.

De **Duitse** situatie wordt gekarakteriseerd door een hoge mate van polarisatie.Aan de ene kant steunen een sterke nationale preferentie voor verandering zowel vanwege de acute problemen en vanwege een sterke (maar betwiste) invloed van de internationale context een hoge mate van verandering. Aan de andere kant, maken de zwakke vermogens van de nationale ministeries and de zeer hardnekkige formele en informele belemmeringen verandering moeilijk. Voorbeelden van dit soort belemmeringen zijn: de wijdverbreide gehechtheid aan het Humboldtiaanse model van HO; de regulering van de toegang tot de publieke en private professionele arbeidsmarkt die niet strookt met de nieuwe graden structuur en de gelaagde wetgeving die voortkomt uit de federale structuur van Duitsland. Deze situatie spiegelt zich duidelijk in een extreme kloof tussen vergaande beleidsverandering op de zeven dimensies, maar een aarzelende nationale besluitvorming over implementatie. De internationale context leidt tot radicale beleidsformulering, maar de zwakte van het nationale ministerie zorgt ervoor dat implementatie wordt overgelaten aan de '*Länder*' en aan de HO instellingen. De '*Länder*'op hun beurt hebben niet de vermogens om het nationale ministerie te vervangen en besluiten slechts tot vage formuleringen als het op implementatie aankomt. Het is interessant om op te merken dat het vermijden van nationale besluitvorming over implementatie verandering niet alleen afremt; de formulering van radicaal beleid wordt er ook door gefaciliteerd, omdat de potentiële conflicten worden vermeden. De polarisatie tussen de verschillende causale factoren leidt tot een verdeeld beeld van de verschillende aspecten van beleidsverandering en tot een gemiddelde positie over het geheel

van verandering. Als de vier hypothesen gezamenlijk worden gebruikt verklaren ze de mate van beleidsverandering in Duitsland opvallend goed.

In **Frankrijk** is de situatie op een andere manier gepolariseerd. Sterke preferenties voor verandering gebaseerd op de druk van een ernstige nationale problematiek en sterke vermogens van het nationale ministerie (die zich overigens niet tot de '*grandes écoles'* uitstrekt) ondersteunt verandering in de universitaire sector. Tegelijkertijd maken formele en informele belemmeringen verandering moeilijk, bijvoorbeeld door de egalitaire waarden diep verankerd in de Franse samenleving en door sterke banden tussen HO diploma's en kansen op werk. Deze informele belemmeringen leiden tot een hoge mate van weerstand van verschillende actoren in het HO beleid. Internationale rolmodellen zijn een belangrijk argument voor verandering van het ministerie. Het geloof dat een twee cycli structuur noodzakelijk is om internationaal concurrerend te blijven is een belangrijke reden voor universiteiten om te hervormen. Maar deze internationale modellen beïnvloeden de logica van nationale hervormingen niet erg diepgaand. De mate van verandering in Frankrijk kan voor een groot deel uit deze tegengestelde krachten verklaard worden. Op sommige dimensies is het nationale ministerie in staat om de informele en formele belemmeringen te overwinnen, zoals de egalitaire waarden achter de raamwerken voor nationale curricula in het geval van besluitvorming over curricula. In deze gevallen worden de voorkeuren van de overheid vertaald in vergaande beleidsformulering. In andere gevallen, zoals de relatie tussen de universiteiten en de '*grandes écoles*' wordt weinig bereikt. In het geval van de '*grandes écoles*' zijn het ook de zwakke vermogens van het ministerie in deze sector, die ertoe bijdragen dat er weinig bereikt wordt. Wat betreft implementatiebeleid is het feit dat de volledige hervorming is vastgelegd in decreten en niet in een wetsverandering een teken van de sterke formele belemmeringen voor verandering. De decentrale implementatie berust op een mix van overtuigen, pressie van de publieke opinie en ruimte voor eigen besluitvorming. Deze benadering is bewust gekozen door het ministerie om een maximale informele verandering te bewerkstelligen onder moeilijke omstandigheden. Dit laat zowel de sterke vermogens van het ministerie als de concessies aan informele belemmeringen zien. De vier hypothesen gezamenlijk verklaren een groot deel van de beleidsverandering in het Franse HO systeem.

Ook in **Nederland** kan de redelijk grote mate van verandering op de meeste dimensies verklaard worden door een combinatie van de vier hypothesen. De redelijk grote vermogens van het nationale ministerie om nationaal beleid te formuleren; een wijdverbreide bereidheid om internationaal rolmodellen te accepteren en een relatieve lage weerstand als een gevolg van formele belemmeringen zorgen voor gunstige omstandigheden voor beleidsverandering. Maar omdat de druk van de problematiek klein is, is de drang tot verandering in de nationale context ook klein. Bovendien zijn informele belemmeringen, zoals de diepe kloof tussen universiteiten en hogescholen en een gehechtheid aan

egalitaire waarden in het onderwijs zo belangrijk dat ze niet kunnen worden 'wegonderhandeld' door het ministerie. Deze factoren reduceren de mate van mogelijke beleidsverandering enigszins, maar over het geheel genomen is de mate van beleidsverandering toch hoog. De constellatie leidt tot een hoge mate van congruentie tussen de beleidsformulering op de zeven dimensies en het implementatiebeleid. Vergeleken met Duitsland en Frankrijk is de Nederlandse situatie veel minder conflictueus en gepolariseerd omdat de druk tot verandering en het vermogen om te veranderen veel meer in overeenstemming zijn. Over het geheel genomen verklaren de vier hypothesen gezamenlijk de mate van beleidsverandering vrij goed; hoewel de hoge mate van beleidsverandering verbazend is, gegeven de lage druk van de nationale problematiek.

De situatie in de **Engelse** case ligt meer genuanceerd. Algemeen gesproken werd beleidsverandering ondersteund door de gematigde preferenties voor verandering afkomstig van de nationale context en de grote invloed van het internationale niveau op de percepties van actoren. Hetzelfde is waar voor de sterke informele vermogens van het ministerie als het gaat om het organiseren van het nationale beleidsproces. Bovendien zijn er weinig formele belemmeringen: wetgeving is relatief onbelangrijk voor vele gebieden binnen het HO en in een 'majority' democratie kan relatief eenvoudig nieuwe wetgeving worden geproduceerd. Dit verklaart de in het algemeen hoge tot gemiddelde mate van beleidsverandering in het Engelse HO systeem. De zaken liggen echter anders voor verandering in de context van het Bolognaproces. Omdat Engeland al een twee cycli structuur had, kon deze verandering niet gebruikt worden als een hefboom om andere veranderingen te bewerkstelligen. Het is echter denkbaar dat met het oog op aansluiting met andere Europese systemen, kleine veranderingen zoals de lengte van de Master fase, introductie van een module systeem, een credit systeem, etc. ingevoerd hadden kunnen worden. Hier speelt een andere factor een rol: hoewel in het algemeen de invloed van de internationale context op de actoren hoog is, is de bereidheid om Europese rolmodellen te accepteren laag, de meeste actoren zien het Bolognaproces als een bedreiging en niet als een mogelijkheid. De wijdverspreide scepsis over Europa bij de Engelse actoren functioneert als een informele belemmering van veranderingen in de context van het Bolognaproces. Bovendien heeft het Engelse ministerie verantwoordelijk voor HO niet de leiding genomen in de reactie op het Bolognaproces. In de praktijk heeft het Engelse ministerie dus zwakke vermogens in dit proces. De combinatie van de unieke uitgangspositie, de sceptische houding ten opzichte van Europa en de zwakke positie van het ministerie in dit proces verklaard de lage mate van verandering in de context van het Bolognaproces. De vier hypothesen gezamenlijk verklaren de mate van beleidsverandering, maar alleen als een sceptische houding ten opzichte van Europa wordt toegevoegd als een modererende variabele.

Discussie van de resultaten

NATIONALE PREFERENTIES EN INTERNATIONALE PERCEPTIES. In het theoretische raamwerk speelt de perceptie van de internationale context een sleutelrol als de factor die de informele nationale belemmeringen kan overwinnen en dus meer verandering mogelijk maakt dan op basis van North's originele model verwacht kan worden. De analyse heeft laten zien dat actor percepties van de internationale context inderdaad nationale beleidsverandering ondersteunen, maar alleen in samenhang met nationale preferenties. Percepties van de internationale context werden vaak gebruikt om de nationale preferenties te legitimeren en te ondersteunen. Soms waren nationale preferenties gebaseerd op de perceptie van de internationale context. De legitimerende rol van internationale percepties, bijvoorbeeld in de vorm van internationale rolmodellen, was extreem effectief en werd vrijwel nooit ter discussie gesteld. Percepties en preferenties conditioneren en versterken elkaar door deze mechanismen. In termen van 'path dependency' theorieën, leiden internationale percepties tot positieve 'feedback loops' en 'lock-in' en helpen ze verklaren waarom een zo hoge mate van verandering kon worden bereikt in zo'n korte periode.

Tegelijkertijd blijven nationale preferenties de *conditio sine qua non* voor nationale veranderingen. Deze studie liet zien dat percepties van de internationale context vaak selectief en vooringenomen en soms fout zijn; percepties verschillen sterk tussen de nationale HO systeem. Hoewel dit vanuit de literatuur van de 'new institutional theory' niet verbazingwekkend is, is dit gegeven zeer relevant in de context van het Bolognaproces. Samen met de autonome aard van het proces en de grote mate waarin het door nationale belangen werd gedreven, helpt dit gegeven te verklaren waarom nationale HO systemen niet duidelijker op één model convergeerden.

VERMOGENS VAN HET NATIONALE MINISTERIE EN INFORMELE BELEMMERINGEN. Een ander belangrijk resultaat betreft de rol van de nationale ministeries verantwoordelijk voor HO in het overwinnen van informele belemmeringen. Deze studie liet zien dat in géén van de vier landen nieuwe regulering werd ingevoerd zonder vooraf stakeholders te consulteren. Ook als het formeel wel mogelijk was om regulering zonder consultatie in te voeren was dat politiek onhaalbaar en zelfs als het politiek wel haalbaar was om niet consulteren besloten ministers toch om stakeholders te consulteren. Nationale beleidsformulering in de context van het Bolognaproces was in alle vier landen een voorbeeld van 'onderhandelen in de schaduw van hiërarchie'. Het hiërarchische element was het sterkst in Frankrijk, gevolgd door Nederland, Duitsland en ten slotte Engeland. De studie wees ook uit dat het voor de kwaliteit van de nationale beleidsformulering (gemeten naar het succes van implementatie) van cruciaal belang was dat het nationale ministerie een nationale hervormingsdialoog organiseerde en leidde. Of dat gebeurde hing af van het strategisch leiderschap

van het ministerie en minder van de formele mogelijkheden om regulering te initiëren en door te voeren.

Hieraan gerelateerd kan de kloof tussen beleidsverandering op de zeven dimensies en implementatiebeleid voornamelijk worden verklaard uit de verschillende vermogens van nationale ministeries om een effectieve nationale coördinatie en onderhandeling van belangen te organiseren. In Frankrijk en Nederland was dit vermogen van verschillende aard, maar in beide gevallen groot. Een gevolg hiervan was dat de veranderingen in regulering op het moment van invoering konden steunen op een hoge mate van consensus, dit betekende dat informele en formele beleidsverandering hand in hand gingen; in Nederland nog sterker dan in Frankrijk. De Engelse en Duitse ministeries hadden dit vermogen niet. In Duitsland was dit een gevolg van het federale systeem en in Engeland het gevolg van een traditie van universitaire autonomie voornamelijk op het gebied van graden. Bovendien nam het Engelse ministerie lange tijd niet de leiderschapsrol op zich. Als een gevolg werd zowel in Duitsland als in Engeland de organisatie van een systematisch nationaal debat gehinderd. In Duitsland resulteerde dit in een implementatiekloof in Engeland in een trage reactie op het Bolognaproces.

Concluderende reflecties

THEORETISCHE EN EMPIRISCHE BIJDRAGEN. Deze studie levert drie belangrijke bijdragen aan de vergroting van het theoretische begrip van HO beleid en beleidsanalyse in het algemeen. Ten eerste integreert de studie elementen van North's theorie van institutionele verandering en Scharpf en Mayntz's 'actor centred institutionalism' (ACI) in een gezamenlijk raamwerk geschikt om beleidsverandering in de context van het Bolognaproces te verklaren. Ten tweede, is dit één van de weinige studies die ACI consistent toepast in een beleidsveld. Ten derde, relateert deze studie de wetenschappelijke analyse van het Bolognaproces aan de bestaande traditie in comparatief HO onderzoek door te demonstreren hoe dit proces raakt aan de centrale issues van HO onderzoek en hervorming.

Empirisch geven de nationale casestudies de eerste diepgaande reconstructie van het proces van beleidsformulering in Duitsland, Nederland, Frankrijk en Engeland. Ten tweede maakt deze studie ook voor het eerst de originele beleidsdocumenten en de nationale debatten op een systematische manier toegankelijk. Ten derde, doordat bij de analyse van de cases gebruik is gemaakt van een theoretisch raamwerk is dit één van de weinige studies die systematische vergelijking mogelijk maakt. Ten vierde, helpt deze studie de hervormingen in het kader van het Bolognaproces te contextualiseren en levert de basis voor een begrip van de verdere ontwikkelingen in de komende jaren. Ten slotte, kan deze studie interessant zijn voor HO onderzoeker die andere hervormingen vanuit

internationaal comparatief perspectief willen bestuderen, omdat de studie algemene inzichten verschaft in hoe beleidsformulering in het HO wordt geconditioneerd door nationale instituties en de vermogens van actoren.

REFLECTIES OP THEORIE EN METHODOLOGIE. Het combineren van institutie- en actor perspectieven bleek onmisbaar te zijn om de aard van het Bolognaproces te begrijpen. De raamwerken van North en Scharpf bleken bovendien compatibel en complementair. Uitdagingen werden gevormd door de overlap tussen sommige begrippen in beide raamwerken en de complexiteit van de analytische 'toolkit'. Bovendien was de keuze voor een focus op de interactie van organisationele in plaats van individuele actoren een beperking omdat daarmee niet altijd recht kon worden gedaan aan de belangrijke bijdragen van individuen in het proces. Desalniettemin, vanuit een 'helikopterperspectief' beschrijft deze studie de belangrijkste posities van actoren en de dynamiek van nationale beleidsformulering opvallend goed. De keuze voor de periode die deze studie beschouwt kan ook als een beperking worden gezien, omdat het te vroeg was om implementatie te bestuderen en beleidsveranderingen nog steeds plaatsvinden. Toch werpt deze studie licht op belangrijke mechanismen die hun validiteit behouden ook als zijn de concrete details van beleidsverandering nog aan verandering onderhevig zijn.

RICHTINGEN VOOR VERDER ONDERZOEK. Sommige van de theoretische perspectieven gecombineerd in deze studie zouden individueel in meer detail kunnen worden bestudeerd in volgende studies. Voorbeelden hiervan zijn: de interactie tussen formele en informele instituties in veranderingsprocessen; nationale actor constellaties en interacties in geselecteerde beleidsarena's en de verschillende vormen van 'path dependency'. Op dezelfde wijze zijn verschillende thematische dimensies in deze studie het waard om in meer diepgang te onderzoeken.Toekomstige casestudies of internationaal comparatieve studies zouden zich kunnen richten op de implicaties van aanpassingen van de gradenstructuren voor een selectie van dimensies in HO systemen: zoals toegang tot het Master niveau of de relatie tussen verschillende typen HO instellingen. Een andere set van onderzoeksideeën is gerelateerd aan manieren om de scope van deze studie te verschuiven, bijvoorbeeld naar de Noordelijke landen, Centraal en Oost Europa en/of de Mediterrane landen. Om de theoretische perspectieven in deze studie te complementeren zou het de moeite waard zijn de rol van individuen en persoonlijke netwerken in het nationale en Europese beleidsproces nader te bestuderen. Over een aantal jaren zou de studie thematisch aangevuld kunnen worden met andere perspectieven op het Bolognaproces zoals de effecten van de aanpassing van gradenstructuren op de relatie tussen onderwijs en onderzoek; op de wederzijdse erkenning van studiepunten en graden en op studenten mobiliteit. Dit laatste is zeer relevant vanuit een politiek perspectief omdat wederzijdse erkenning en mobiliteit de belangrijkste redenen vormen voor de convergentie van de HO systemen. Ten

slotte, op basis van het begrip van beleidsverandering uit deze studie zouden implementatie studies een belangrijke stap vooruit zijn in de komende jaren.

BELEIDSIMPLICATIES. Deze studie heeft bewust geen normatieve posities ingenomen en het perspectief gekozen van beleidsanalyse en niet van implementatie onderzoek. Toch zijn hier een aantal normatieve gedachten op hun plaats. De volgende lessen kunnen relevant zijn voor zowel beleidsmakers in de context van het Bolognaproces als voor de staf van HO instellingen.

De eerste les is de noodzaak om het wederzijdse begrip tussen beleidsmakers van verschillende nationaliteiten te verdiepen over hoe de Bologna hervormingen in hun landen zijn gebonden aan de nationale context. Het niet begrijpen van de institutionele tradities in verschillende landen kan leiden tot verkeerd gericht nationaal beleid, aangenomen dat convergentie de intentie is. De volgende implicatie is dat de Europese beleidsdialoog moet worden geïntensiveerd en de netwerken waarin de dialoog plaatsvindt moeten worden uitgebreid. Maar ook op het hoogste politieke niveau is het opnieuw creëren van een internationale dialoog en het waarborgen van de continuïteit ervan belangrijk om de gezamenlijke doelen van het Bolognaproces niet uit het oog te verliezen.

De internationale beleidsdialoog kan het meest vruchtbaar worden versterkt in die gebieden waar nationale verschillen groot zijn en het bereiken van de gemeenschappelijk Bolognadoelstellingen in de weg staan. Er zijn vijf gebieden waarop zo'n dialoog het hardst nodig is: de transitie van secundair onderwijs naar HO, de aard van de eerste graad, de onderzoeksbasis van Master programma's, doctoraal onderwijs en de wijze van beleid maken in het HO.

In afwezigheid van duidelijke recepten om de mate van convergentie significant toe te laten nemen stel ik een alternatief perspectief voor op de kwestie van erkenning en mobiliteit. Het is tijd om opnieuw na te denken over doelgerichte maatregelen voor het verbeteren van erkenning van mobiliteit in het licht van een bepaalde mate van hardnekkige diversiteit van nationale HO systemen. Zo'n poging zou ertoe kunnen leiden dat het gevaar van de 'provincialisatie' van de Bolognahervormingen wordt voorkomen en dat een nieuwe impuls wordt gegeven aan de belangrijke visie dat onze kinderen op een dag vrijer en makkelijker dan nu in Europa kunnen bewegen, zowel als studenten en als kennis werkers.

Appendix

A   Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning (translation, if needed, and national context, if any, in brackets)
A level	Advanced level (England)
ACI	Actor-centred institutionalism
ACO	*Adviescommissie Onderwijsaanbod* (Advisory commission on HE programme supply, the Netherlands)
ADUIT	*L'Assemblée des Directeurs d'IUT* (Assembly of directors of IUTs, France)
AMUE	*Agence de mutualisation des universités et établissements* (Agency for Mutualisation of Higher Education Institutions, France)
AR	*Akkreditierungsrat* (Accreditation Council, Germany)
AS level	Advanced subsidiary level (England)
BDA	*Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände* (Confederation of German Employers' Associations)
BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
BMBF	*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* (Federal Ministry for Education and Research, Germany)
BTS	*Brevet de technicien supérieur* (Higher technician certificate, tertiary non-HE education, France)
CDEFI	*Conférence des directeurs d'écoles et formations d'ingénieurs* (Conference of directors of schools and programmes of engineering, France)
CHE	*Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung* (Centre for Higher Education Development, Germany)
CHEPS	Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (the Netherlands)
CNE	*Comité national d'évaluation des établissements publics à caractère scientifique, culturel et professionnel* (National Evaluation Committee, France)
CNE	Commission nationale d'expertise pour les licences professionnelles (National expert commission for *licence professionnelle* programmes, France)
CNESER	*Conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (National council for HE and research, France)
CNRS	*Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique* (National centre of scientific research, France)

Abbreviation	Meaning (translation, if needed, and national context, if any, in brackets)
CNW	*Curricularnormwerte* (normative measure of teacher-student ratio, Germany)
CPGE	*Classe préparatoire aux grandes écoles* (Programmes preparing for the *grandes écoles*, France)
CPU	*Conférence des Présidents d'Université* (Conference of University Presidents, France)
CROHO	*Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs* (Central register for HE programmes, the Netherlands)
CTI	*Commission des titres d'ingénieurs* (Commission for the 'accreditation' of engineering programmes, France)
CVCP	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (England)
DAAD	*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (German Academic Exchange Service)
DEA	*Diplôme d'études approfondis* (research-oriented Masters-level degree traditionally granted by universities upon successful completion of five years of fulltime studies, France)
DESS	*Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées* (professionally-oriented Masters-level degree traditionally granted by universities upon successful completion of five years of fulltime studies, France)
DEUG	*Diplôme d'études universitaires générales* (diploma granted upon successful completion of the first two years of university education, France)
DEUST	*Diplôme d'études universitaires scientifiques et techniques* (diploma in science and engineering, granted upon successful completion of the first two years of university education, France)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (name of English ministry in charge of HE until 2001)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (name of English ministry in charge of HE since 2001)
DHV	*Deutscher Hochschulverband* (Association of University Professors in Germany)
DNM	*Diplôme national de master* (state-'accredited' Masters degree newly introduced in France)
DUT	*Diplôme universitaire de technologie* (diploma granted upon successful completion of a two-year technical programme at a IUT, France)
DVC	Dutch Validation Council (The Netherlands)
EC	European Commission
ECG	European Co-ordinating Group (England)
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Abbreviation	Meaning (translation, if needed, and national context, if any, in brackets)
ESIB	The National Union of Students in Europe
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
FE	Further education (England)
fzs	*Freiwilliger Zusammenschluß der StudentInnenschaften* (The National Union of Students in Germany)
GPD	Gross Domestic Product
GG	*Grundgesetz* (Germany constitution)
HAVO	*Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs* (General secondary education in the Netherlands)
HBO	*Hoger beroepsonderwijs* ('Professional' higher education, traditionally taught at *hogescholen*, in the Netherlands)
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	The Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute (England)
hlb	*Hochschullehrerbund* (Association of Professors at *Fachhochschulen*, Germany)
HLPF	High Level Policy Forum (England)
HNC	Higher National Certificate (England)
HND	Higher National Diploma (England)
HOOP	*Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoeksplan* (HE and research and development plan, put forward by the Dutch ministry in charge of HE every four years)
HRG	*Hochschulrahmengesetz* (Federal Higher Education Framework Act, Germany)
HRK	*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* (German rectors' conference)
IGAENR	*Inspection générale de l'administration, de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche* (National inspectorate of administration, education and research, France)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISO	*Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg* (Dutch National Students Association, the Netherlands)
IUFM	*Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres* (University institute for teacher training, France)
IUP	*Institut universitaire professionnalisé* (Professionally-oriented university institute, France)

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Abbreviation	Meaning (translation, if needed, and national context, if any, in brackets)
IUT	*Institut universitaire de technologie* (University institute of technology, France)
KapVo	*Kapazitätsverordnung* (legal framework regulating the distribution of scarce HE capacities in Germany)
KMK	*Kultursministerkonferenz* (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany)
KNAW	*Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Netherlands)
La FAGE	Fédération des Associations Générales Étudiants (France)
LSVb	*Landelijke Studenten Vakbond* (Nationwide student union in the Netherlands)
MBO	*Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* (Senior secondary vocational education in the Netherlands)
MEDEF	Mouvement des Entreprises de France (French Business Confederation)
MEN	*Ministère de l'éducation nationale* (generic abbreviation for French education ministry over time, given the frequent change of exact name)
MENESR	*Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (National ministry of education, HE and research, France)
MIAGE	*Maîtrise d'informatique appliquée à la gestion des entreprises* (Masters-level degree traditionally granted upon successful completion of four years of fulltime studies, France)
MOCenW	*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands)
MSG	*Maîtrise de sciences de gestion* (Masters-level degree traditionally granted upon successful completion of four years of fulltime studies, France)
MST	*Maîtrise de sciences et techniques* (Masters-level degree traditionally granted upon successful completion of four years of fulltime studies, France)
MSTP	*Mission scientifique, technique et pédagogique* (Scientific, technical and educational expert directorate in the MEN evaluating research-based HE programmes, France)
MWF	*Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westphalen* (Ministry of Science and Research of the Land North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany)
NAO	*Nederlandse Accreditatie Organisatie* (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands)

Abbreviation	Meaning (translation, if needed, and national context, if any, in brackets)
NL	The Netherlands
NUS	The National Union of Students (England)
NVAO	*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie* (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders)
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access (England)
PAEPON	*Platform van Aangewezen / Erkende Particuliere Onderwijsinstellingen in Nederland* (Platform for recognised private higher and further education institutions in the Netherlands)
PDE	*Promotion et Défense des Etudiants* (one of several national student organisations, France)
PGC	Postgraduate Certificate (England)
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education (England)
PQA	Post-qualification applications (England)
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (England)
RPO	*Rahmenprüfungsordnung* (Framework regulation for examinations, Germany)
SCOP	The Standing Conference of Principals (Association of heads of HE Colleges, England)
SE	Secondary education, used as shortcut for secondary education normally required in the respective country to enter HE
SNESUP	*Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (National union of academic staff, France)
StMWFK	*Bayrisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst* (Bavarian State Ministry of Sciences, Research and the Arts, Germany)
STS	*Section de techniciens supérieurs* (Special class at the *lycée,* non-HE tertiary education, France)
SWS	*Semesterwochenstunden* (Number of hours taught per week in a semester, Germany)
UK	United Kingdom
UK NARIC	UK National Academic Recognition and Information Centre
UNEF	*Union Nationale des Étudiants de France – le syndicat étudiant* (National Student Union, France)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UUK	Universities UK (British university vice chancellors' association)

Abbreviation	Meaning (translation, if needed, and national context, if any, in brackets)
VAWO	*Vereniging van en voor Personeel aan Universiteiten en Onderzoeksinstellingen* (Pro Science Union, Association of academic HE staff in the Netherlands)
VBI	*Visiterende en beoordelende instantie* (Committees carrying out site visits for accreditation, the Netherlands)
VNO-NCW	*Vereniging VNO-NCW* (Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers, the Netherlands)
VSNU	*Vereniging van Universiteiten in Nederland* (Association of Universities in the Netherlands)
VWO	*Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* (Secondary education preparing for university education, the Netherlands)
WHW	*Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek* (Dutch National HE Act)
WO	*Wetenschappelijk onderwijs* ('academic' higher education, traditionally taught at universities, the Netherlands)
WR	Wissenschaftsrat (Science council, Germany)
WRR	*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid* (Scientific Council for Government Policy, the Netherlands)
ZVS	*Zentralstelle zur Vergabe von Studienplätzen* (Central agency for the allocation of places in HE programmes, Germany)

Note: Where an official English translation was available, this is indicated by capital letters. Where no such translation was available, I have opted for a translation that conveys the meaning.

B   Timelines

B1   Europe

21 Dec 1988	EC Council Directive 89/48/EE defines three years as standard for mutual recognition of HE diplomas.
11 Apr 1997	*Lisbon Recognition Convention* of the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES "Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning HE in the European Region" aims at facilitating academic mobility.

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25 May 1998	**Sorbonne Declaration**. "Joint declaration on the harmonisation of the Architecture of the European HE system". Signed by the ministers in charge of HE of France, Germany, Italy, and the UK.
24 Sept 1998	European Council adopts a "Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in HE" (98/561 EC), leading to the establishment of ENQA.
19 June 1999	**Bologna Declaration**. "The European HE Area: Joint declaration of the European ministers of education". 29 signatory countries. 6 action lines.
Aug 1999	EUA publishes "Trends in Learning Structures in HE" (First Trends Report).
18 Jan 2000	Proposal of the European Commission "Towards a European Research Area" (COM 2000/6).
23 – 24 Mar 2000	*Lisbon European Council* meeting. Presidency conclusions state the aim to render the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.
29 Mar 2000	Establishment of ENQA, Brussels.
07 – 09 Dec 2000	Nice European Council. Passes action programme on student mobility.
16 – 17 Feb 2001	Official Bologna Seminar on Bachelor-Level Degrees. Helsinki, Finland.
02 – 03 Mar 2001	Official Bologna Seminar on Transnational Education. Malmö, Sweden.
22 – 25 Mar 2001	ESIB, Student Göteborg Convention and Declaration.
29 – 30 Mar 2001	1st Convention of European HEIs, Message from Salamanca. Fusion of the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and CRE to form the EUA.

Apr 2001	EUA publishes "Trends in Learning Structures in HE (II)" (Second Trends Report).
19 May 2001	**Prague Communiqué**. "Towards the European HE Area: Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of HE". 32 signatory countries. 3 action lines added.
18 Nov 2001	ESIB, Brussels Student Declaration stresses the importance of access to HE on an equitable basis.
15 – 16 Mar 2002	Barcelona European Council. Stresses contribution of Bologna process to the Lisbon agenda.
06 Mar 2002	EUA and ESIB Joint Declaration, Paris.
05 Feb 2002	European Commission Communication "The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge". For the first time, the European Commission addresses the HE sector directly to discuss the role of universities in the future of Europe.
Sept 2002	EUA publishes "Survey on Master degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe"
30 Nov 2002	The education ministers of 31 European countries and the European Commission adopt the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced cooperation in European vocational education and training.
05 Feb 2003	5th European Student Convention, Athens. Stresses the need to overcome obstacles to mobility.
11 Feb 2003	European Commission publishes "ECTS key features".
15 – 14 Mar 03	Official "Bologna Seminar on Master-level degrees", Helsinki, Finland.
29 – 31 May 2003	2nd EUA convention, Graz declaration.
July 2003	EUA publishes "Trends 2003: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area" (Third Trends Report)
19 Sept 2003	**Berlin Communiqué.** 33 signatories, accepting 7 new participants. One additional action line.
14 Oct 2004	European Commission "Proposal for a Recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education".
04 Nov 2004	ENQA is turned from a network into an association based on criteria for membership.
31 Mar – 02 Apr 05	3rd EUA convention, Glasgow declaration.
19 – 20 May 2005	**Bergen Communiqué**. 40 signatory countries, accepting 5 new participants.
25 May 2005	EUA publishes "Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna" (Fourth Trends Report)

B2   EU Presidencies 1998-2005

1998	First half-year	UK
	Second half-year	Austria
1999	First half-year	Germany
	Second half-year	Finland[380]
2000	First half-year	Portugal
	Second half-year	France
2001	First half-year	Sweden
	Second half-year	Belgium
2002	First half-year	Spain
	Second half-year	Denmark
2003	First half-year	Greece
	Second half-year	Italy
2004	First half-year	Ireland
	Second half-year	Netherlands
2005	First half-year	Luxembourg
	Second half-year	UK

B3   Germany

18 Dec 1996	The Federation and the *Länder* publish a common declaration on increasing the international competitiveness of the German HE system.
24 Oct 1997	KMK publishes decision on the strengthening of the international competitiveness of the German HE system.
10 Nov 1997	HRK Plenary passes statement on the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes.

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25 May 1998	**Sorbonne declaration,** signed by the Federal Ministry.
06 July 1998	HRK Plenary passes statement on accreditation.
20 Aug 1998	Federal Parliament passes Fourth Amendment of Federal HE Framework Act.
27 Sept 1998	Social-democrat/green coalition under Gerhard Schröder wins general elections and replaces former Christian-democrat/liberal government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

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[380] Since the second half of 1999, the country holding the EU Presidency also chairs the BFUG.

03 Dec 1998	KMK passes decision on the introduction of accreditation for Bachelor and Masters programmes.
05 Mar 1999	KMK passes first version of 'Structural Guidelines'.
19 July 1999	**Bologna declaration**, signed by the Federal Ministry and the *Länder*.
Oct 1999	BDA publishes declaration in favour of Bachelor and Masters programmes.
30 Nov 1999	*Akkreditierungsrat* issues standards and criteria for the accreditation of agencies and degree programmes.
21 Jan 2000	*Wissenschaftsrat* makes recommendation on Bachelor and Masters programmes.
04 Feb 2000	First accreditation agency accredited (ZEvA).
21 Feb 2000	HRK Plenary passes statement on categorisation of Bachelor and Masters programmes.
14 Apr 2000	KMK publishes statement on categorisation of Bachelor and Masters programmes graduates in public service.
15 Sept 2000	KMK publishes guidelines on the introduction of credits and modularisation.
10 Nov 2000	KMK publishes report on progress of Bologna process in Germany, published 24 Nov 2000 as German National Report for the Prague Conference.
19 May 2001	**Prague communiqué,** signed by BMBF and the Länder.
20 Feb 2001	HRK makes first clear statement in favour of conversion.
20 June 2001	*Akkreditierungsrat* publishes frame of reference for Bachelor and Masters programmes.
16 Nov 2001	WR recommends conversion of teacher training to Bachelor and Masters programmes.
14 Dec 2001	KMK passes second version of 'Structural guidelines'.
01 Mar 2002	KMK passes decision on recognition of Bachelor and Masters programmes in teacher training.
01 Mar 2002	KMK passes guidelines on the conversion to a full-scale accreditation system.
24 Apr 2002	KMK passes decision on permanent institutionalisation of *Akkreditierungsrat*.
25 Apr 2002	German National Report for Berlin Conference published.
06 June 2002	KMK/IMK pass decision on categorisation of Bachelor and Masters programmes graduates in public service.
08 Aug 2002	Federal Parliament passes Sixth Amendment of the Federal HE Framework Act.
22 Sept 2002	Social-democrat/green coalition government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder is confirmed by general elections and stays in office. Edelgard Bulmahn remains minister in charge of HE.

24 Sept 2002	Report on evaluation of *Akkreditierungsrat* published.
15 Nov 2002	*Wissenschaftsrat* publishes recommendations on the Bachelor and Masters structure in *Staatsexamen* programmes.
Jan 2003	Confusion over a DHV news that German Bachelor graduates are not accepted into British Masters programmes.
02 Feb 2003	AFT publishes recommendations on Bachelor and Masters programmes.
30 Apr 2003	*Stifterverband* criticises deficits of Bachelor and Masters programmes in Germany.
12 June 2003	KMK publishes "10 Theses on the Bachelor-Masters structure in Germany".
19 Sept 2003	**Berlin communiqué** is signed by the Federal Ministry and the *Länder*.
10 Oct 2003	KMK passes third version of 'Structural Guidelines' and takes note of an internal report on the effect of the introduction of the Bachelor and Masters structure on capacity.
04 Nov 2003	HRK criticises overregulation in KMK Structural Guidelines.
Nov 2003	BMBF, HRK, and KMK sign common declaration of recognition of prior professional qualifications.
Jan 2004	*Wissenschaftsrat* recommends that right of HEIs to select students upon entry of HE should be strengthened.
03 Feb 2004	B-*Länder* ministers in charge of HE refuse cooperation with Federal Ministry.
11 Feb 2004	HRK demands quick implementation of ECTS.
11 Feb 2004	HRK calls upon its university members not to discriminate against Bachelor graduates from *Fachhochschulen* for entry into their Masters programmes.
30 Mar 2004	DHV, AFT and teacher unions warn of quality loss through Bachelor and Masters programmes.
03 May 2004	First public hearing on Bologna process in Federal Parliament.
June 2004	Leading German Employers publish declaration "Bachelor welcome!".
04 June 2004	KMK announces intention to put *Akkreditierungrat* on proper legal basis and clarify task distribution between *Akkreditierungrat* and agencies.
09 June 2004	HRK calls for radical simplification of Federal HE Framework Act.
01 July 2004	HRK opens Bologna Service Point with BMBF funding.
07 July 2004	Berlin Higher Administrative Court entitles Free University Berlin to deviate from existing capacity regulations to improve teacher-student ratio in Bachelor programme.
14 July 2004	Conference at *Fachhochschule* Dortmund on the implications of the Bologna process for *Fachhochschulen*.

Sep 2004	DAAD starts ProBiG programme.
27 Sep 2004	HRK calls upon KMK and Federal Ministry to be able to "speak with one voice" when representing German interests at European level.
13 Oct 2004	TU 9 publish position statement implying that they do not accept the Bachelor degree as "normative degree" for university engineers.
15 Oct 2004	KMK publishes statement on further development of accreditation in Germany and decides to allow *Berufsakademien* to grant Bachelor degrees, subject to accreditation.
20 Oct 2004	KMK responds to TU 9 statement.

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02 Nov 2004	HRK announces opening of Bologna Competence Centre.
10 Nov 2004	HRK criticises KMK decision to allow *Berufsakademien* to grant Bachelor degrees, and calls for more leeway for HEIs regarding Bachelor and Masters programmes in teacher education.
29 Nov 2004	KMK draft report on further development of capacity law.
30 Nov 2004	HRK calls for adequate funding for the transition to the Bachelor and Masters structure.
16 Dec 2004	KMK agrees in principle on Amendment of 'Structural Guidelines' to include Arts and Music.
16 Dec 2004	KMK agrees on creating permanent legal basis for the Akkreditierungsrat in the form of a foundation.
12 Apr 2005	Constitutional Court refuses appeal of the Prime Minister of Hesse against Bologna Competence Centre.

B4   The Netherlands

31 Jan 1995	Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) publishes report "HE in phases".
1998	Legal possibility for universities to grant *kandidaat* degree after three year of studies created.
03 Aug 1998	The liberal politician Loek Hermans (VVD) becomes new Minister for Education, Culture and Research under the *Cabinet Wim Kok II* (made up of the Social Democrats (PvdA) and the two liberal parties VVD and D66).

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18 May 1998	**Sorbonne declaration** signed by Hermans.
22 Feb 1999	Ministry publishes agenda for HOOP 2000.
31 May 1999	Education Council publishes report 'Higher Education in International Context'.
19 June 1999	**Bologna declaration** signed by Hermans.

Sept 1999	Ministry publishes draft HOOP 2000.
Sept 99 – Jan 00	Consultation of HOOP 2000.
Jan 2000	Ministry publishes HOOP 2000.
May 2000	Ministry sets up Rinnooy Kan Commission.
July 2000	Rinnooy Kan Commission publishes report 'The Introduction of the Bachelor-Masters System in Higher Education'.
July 2000	Ministry publishes white paper 'Attention to Quality'.
06 Nov 2000	Ministry installs Franssen Commission.
13 Nov 2000	The Ministry publishes white paper 'Towards open HE: Introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure into Dutch HE'.
Nov 00 – Mar 01	Consultation of the White Paper ,Towards open HE'.
19 May 2001	**Prague communiqué** signed by Hermans.
Sept 2001	Franssen Commission publishes final report ('Setting incentives, achieving, distinguishing').
13 Sept 2001	Ministry presents draft amendment of National HE Act with respect to accreditation (Nr. 27920) to the Lower House.
01 Oct 2001	Ministry presents draft amendment of National HE Act and National Study Finance Act 2000 with respect to the introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure (Nr. 28024) to the Lower House.
07 Feb 2002	The Lower House passes amendments of National HE Act and National Study Finance Act 2000 with respect to Bachelor-Masters and amendment of National HE Act with respect to accreditation.
06 June 2002	The Upper House passes amendment of National HE Act and National Study Finance Act 2000 with respect to Bachelor-Masters and amendment of National HE Act with respect to accreditation.
22 July 2002	Hermans is followed by the Christian Democrat Maria van der Hoeven as Education Minister under the new *Cabinet Balkenende I* (made up of the Christian Democrats (CDA) the right- liberal Party VVD and the right populist *List Pim Fortuyn*). HE policy is delegated to the Secretary of State Annette Nijs (VVD).
01 Aug 2002	Amendment of National HE Act with respect to accreditation becomes effective (in parts). The NAO is officially set up.
01 Sept 2002	Amendment of National HE Act and National Study Finance Act 2000 with respect to the introduction of a Bachelor-Masters structure becomes effective. Most higher education institutions convert their programme supply to Bachelor and Masters by the start of the academic year 2002/2003.
Oct 2002	Reneman Commission (also: Working Group 'top Masters') publishes report ('Clarity through differentiation').
27 May 2003	Start of term of *Cabinet Balkenende II* (made up of the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the two liberal Parties VVD and D66).

May 2003	NAO accreditation frameworks become effective.
May 2003	Ministry presents another amendment of a range of laws with respect to Bachelor and Masters to the Lower House.
Aug 2003	Education Inspectorate publishes first monitoring report ('Transition to BaMa').
03 Sept 2003	Lower House signs contract between NL and Flanders on the creation of NVAO.
19 Sept 2003	**Berlin communiqué**
29 Sept 2003	Ministry starts preparation of HOOP 2004.
Dec 2003	White Paper on top programmes, differentiation of fees and student selection published ('Unlimited talent').
Jan 2004	Ministry publishes 'draft HOOP 2004'.
May 2004	Education Inspectorate publishes second monitoring report ('Mastering the Masters?').
17 June 2004	Nijs is followed by Marc Rutte (also VVD) as Secretary of State for HE.
Aug 2004	Ministry publishes HOOP 2004.
Oct 2004	Lower House passes amendment of a range of laws with respect to Bachelor and Masters (Nr. 28925).

B5 France

04 June 1997	Arrival of Claude Allègre as Education Minister under the new socialist government of Lionel Jospin.
July 1997	Allègre charges Jacques Attali with a commission on how to overcome the dichotomy of universities and *grandes écoles*.
Oct 97 – May 98	Work of the Attali Commission.
Feb 1998	First meeting of ministry with IUTs on *licence professionelle*.
Feb 1998	Start of drafting of Attali report.
Early 1998	Allègre has idea of Sorbonne declaration and contacts Jürgen Rüttgers and Luigi Berlinguer.
End 04/early 05 98	Allègre contacts Tessa Blackstone.
05 Mai 1998	Attali report is published.
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18 Mai 1998	**Sorbonne declaration** signed by Allègre.
19 Nov 1998	Creation of *EduFrance*
Dec 1998	Ministry formally starts consultation on French translation of the Sorbonne declaration with orientation document "HE: European harmonisation".

Jan 99 – Oct 99	Consultation of *licence professionelle* in CNESER and with stakeholders.
19 June 1999	**Bologna declaration** signed by Allègre.
30 Aug 1999	Decree n° 99-747 on "creation of a *grade de mastaire*" (modified on 25 April 2002 to '*master*') becomes effective.
21 Oct 1999	Position paper of CPU on *licence professionelle*.
25 Oct 1999	Decree on *licence professionelle* discussed in CNESER.
08 Nov 1999	Decree on *licence professionelle* passes the CNESER with a large positive majority.
17 Nov 1999	*Arrêté* on *licence professionelle* becomes effective.
26 Nov 1999	Ministerial letter to university presidents containing instructions for the submission of *licence professionelle* projects in the accreditation campaigns of the years 2000-2002.
21 Mar 2000	'Accreditation Commission' (*Commission Nationale d'Expertise*) put into place for *licence professionelle*.
Apr 2000	Allègre is dismissed over public resistance to his disputed 'neo-liberal' school policy, and is followed by Jack Lang as Minister in charge of HE under the same government.
July – Dec 2000	French Presidency of European Council. Lang promotes mobility action plan, signed by the Heads of State on the Summit of Nice in December 2000.
Autumn 2000	First 178 *licence professionelle* programmes start running.
18 Dec 2000	Follow-up committee (*comité de suivi*) on *licence professionelle* installed.
Jan 2001	As the opening of the public consultation of the second wave of reforms, ministerial discussion paper circulates informally in HE sector ("Construction of the European HE area: orientations for the next stage").
08 Feb 2001	CPU responds favourably to Lang's discussion paper.
30 – 31 Mar 01	Salamanca convention. EUA is formally created, Eric Froment becomes first president.
04 Apr 2001	Helfer Commission installed by decree.
23 Apr 2001	Discussion paper of Lang is formally presented and discussed in CNESER, backed up by a speech of the minister.
19 May 2001	**Prague communiqué** signed by Lang.
05 July 2001	Minister explains his policy to CPU.
17 July 2001	Korolitski explains ministerial policy to SNESUP.
17 July 2001	Clarification and refinement of the earlier discussion paper and speech of Lang in the CNESER through a "document of reflection" issued by the ministry in the course of the consultation with the sector.
Sept 2001	Ministerial circular on *habilitation* campaign 2002.

26 Nov 2001	Decrees n° 2002-481 and -482 pass CNESER with a positive majority.
11 Dec 2001	Lang reiterates intention to overcome divide between universities and *grandes écoles*.
17 Jan 2002	"Social modernisation law" advances conditions for recognition of prior learning.
08 Apr 2002	Decree n° 2002-480 modifies spelling of *mastaire* to *master*.
08 Apr 2002	Decree n° 2002-481 introduces the system of *grades*, *titres*. and *diplôme national*.
08 Apr 2002	Decree n° 2002-482 introduces three grades (*licence, master, doctorat)*, the semester system and modularisation, ECTS, and the diploma supplement. Highlights a whole range of curricular reform ambitions.
16 Apr 2002	Decree n° 2002-529 on the application of the Education Act to the recognition of student achievements in France and abroad.
23 Apr 2002	*Arrêté* on university studies leading towards the *grade de licence*.
24 Apr 2002	Decree n° 2002-590 on the application of the Education Act relating to the recognition of work experience by HEIs.
25 Apr 2002	Arrêté on the *diplôme national de master*.
25 Apr 2002	*Arrêté* on doctoral studies.
25 Apr 2002	*Arrêté* on the DESS.
25 Apr 2002	*Arrêté* to include the *diplôme de master* in the list of diplomas entitling to the *grade de master*.
30 Apr 2002	Decree n° 2002-654 provides for the public funding of HEIs' international activities.
May 2002	Lang is followed by Luc Ferry as education minister under the new conservative prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Demichel remains head of the DES.
26 June 2002	First ministerial circular on the *habilitation* campaign 2003.
31 July 2002	Demichel leaves ministry, is replaced by Jean-Marc Monteil.
07 – 11/2002	Monteil consults his approach with HEIs.
Summer 2002	Helfer Commission takes first decisions.
Autumn 2002	Three piloting universities (Artois, Lille II, and Valenciennes,) pass to LMD.
07 Oct 2002	Ferry outlines his policy on LMD in a press conference.
10 – 12/2002	First efforts of student organisations to mobilise resistance against LMD, but does not spread beyond three universities (Montpellier 3, Toulouse 2, Bordeaux 3).
14 Nov 2002	Second ministerial circular on *habilitation* campaign 2003.
04 Dec 2002	Press release of the ministry defending its policies against union critique.

15 Jan 2005	Deadline for submission of *habilitation* proposals of 2003 groups of universities
20 Feb 2003	Position paper of the CPU on LMD "European harmonisation: LMD system".
05 Mar 2003	Ministry spreads a communiqué issued by a joint ADIUT-CPU working group on the role of IUTs in the provision of *licence* programmes.
09 May 2003	Ferry presents the draft amendment of the "university modernisation law".
May 2003	Start of work of follow-up committees (*comités de suivi*) *licence* and *master*.
End May 2003	Ferry postpones presentation of draft "university modernisation law" in the Council of Ministers to autumn given the fierce resistance.
04 June 2003	Duby Commission for the accreditation of professional Masters programmes offered by engineering schools set up.
02 July 2003	AMUE seminar "The implementation of LMD in French universities".
Autumn 2003	First regular group of universities passes to LMD (14 out of 14 universities). 750 *licence professionelle* programmes in a wide range of professional fields.. 50% of *licence professionelle* programmes implemented within IUTs.
03 July 2003	Ministerial circular on *habilitation* campaign 2004.
19 Sept 2003	**Berlin declaration**
Oct 2003	Follow-up committee on *licence professionelle* resumes work.
22 Oct 2003	Ministerial press release and stock-taking on LMD on the occasion of the start of the academic year 2003/2004.
12 Nov 2003	CPU position paper clarifying their view on role of IUPs in LMD.
17 Nov 2003	Deadline for submission of programme supply for *habilitation* campaign 2004.
19 Nov 2003	Press release of the ministry on future of IUPs.
Nov – Dec 2003	Student protests against LMD
21 Nov 2003	Ferry announces that he intends to maintain his "university modernisation law" project.
22 Nov 2003	17 universities are on strike, following a campaign of the UNEF against the LMD.
24 Nov 2003	Ministerial press release, arguing against the UNEF criticism.
27 Nov 2003	CPU position paper in support of LMD and government policy.
01 Dec 2003	27 universities on strike against LMD.
03 Dec 2003	Ferry receives student unions for dialogue.
Jan 2004	Report by Elie Cohen & Philippe Aghion containing a fundamental critique of the French HE system.

Early Mar 04	CNRS researchers lay down their administrative duties to protest against cost-cutting measures in the research budget.
End Mar 04	Socialist Party wins regional elections.
31 Mar 2004	Luc Ferry falls over his "modernisation law" project and is followed by François Fillon as education minister.
22 Apr 2004	First presentation of Fillon to CPU.
08 June 2004	Ministry publishes first four recommendations of the follow-up committees on *licence* and *master*.
23 June 2004	Joint declaration of CPU, CDEFI and CGE in support of the European HE area.
30 Aug 2004	Ministerial circular on *habilitation* campaign 2005.
Autumn 2004	Second group of universities (2004-7, *vague* B) passes to LMD, plus a number of late adopters from the last group and early adopters of the next groups
30 Sept 2004	Fillon starts initiative on strengthening of doctoral education.
07 Oct 2004	Press conference with stocktaking of CPU on LMD: 70 universities (2/3) have moved to LMD.
22 Oct 2004	Circular by Monteil opens consultation on future of doctoral education and a project on international joint doctoral degrees.
19 Nov 2004	Deadline submission of programme supply for *habilitation* campaign 2005.
Autumn 2005	At the time foreseen for the third group (C, 2005-8), all but one remaining universities passes to LMD.

B6   England

10 May 1996	Dearing Committee set up.
01 May 1997	UK general elections bring Labour government to power.
02 May 1997	David Blunkett becomes Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Tessa Blackstone Minister of State with special responsibility for HE.
23 July 1997	Dearing Report published. Government announces to follow recommendation of upfront tuition fee of £1,000.
23 Sept 1997	Government announces funding package for HE, including £4m to resume growth at sub-degree level.
26 Nov 1997	Teaching and Higher Education Bill is introduced in the House of Lords.
1997	Establishment of QAA. Its first Director is John Randall.
25 Feb 1998	DfEE publishes "Government Response to the Dearing report" and Green Paper on Lifelong Learning.

31 Mar 1998	Teaching and Higher Education Bill 1998 reaches House of Commons.

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18 May 1998	**Sorbonne declaration**, signed by Blackstone on behalf of UK as a whole.
16 July 1998	Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 receives Royal Assent.
24 July 1998	End of consultation phase for Green Paper "The Learning Age".
May 1999	First elections for devolved National Assembly for Wales and Scottish Parliament; both start working in July.
19 June 1999	**Bologna declaration**, signed by Tessa Blackstone on behalf of UK as a whole.
29 Oct 1999	DfEE revises criteria for degree awarding powers and university title (first time).
Dec 1999	UUK spending review submission 2000.
15 Feb 2000	Blunkett launches Consultation Paper on the new Foundation Degree.
04 July 2000	QAA Director calls "honorary" MA from Oxbridge "misleading anomaly".
10 July 2000	HEFCE invites partnerships of HEIs, employers and FE colleges to develop prototype Foundation degrees (start 2001/2002).
Sept 2000	Curriculum 2000 introduced, including AS levels.
01 Dec 2000	CVCP's name, logo and identity are changed to Universities UK.
Jan 2001	QAA publishes framework for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as part of a broader 'academic infrastructure' including subject benchmark statements, programme specifications, codes of practice (and progress files).
19 May 2001	**Prague communiqué**, separately signed by Scottish representative following devolution.
08 June 2001	Start of Labour Government's second term. DfEE becomes DfES. Blunkett is followed by Estelle Morris as Secretary of State for Education and Skills.
21 Aug 2001	John Randall resigns as Director of QAA and is followed by Peter Williams. QAA decides to phase out subject reviews and rely on institutional audit.
Sept 2001	Launch of Foundation degrees.
Nov 2001	Credit guidelines for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland published.
Dec 2001	UUK spending review submission 2002 "Investing for success".
Feb 2002	DfES publishes Green Paper "14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards".
06 June 2002	SCOP response to Green Paper on 14-19 reform.

July 2002	QAA publishes new "Handbook for institutional audit".
July – Sept 2002	A-level grading crisis.
Autumn 2002	Foundation degrees rolled out.
24 Oct 2002	Morris resigns and is followed by Charles Clarke as Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Alan Johnson MP becomes Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education.
Dec 2002	Mike Tomlinson "Inquiry into A level standards" published.
13 Jan 2003	Article in Guardian on Foundation degree shows it is disputed.
22 Jan 2003	DfES publishes White Paper "The Future of Higher Education".
Jan 2003	DfES Response to consultation on 14-19 Green Paper "Opportunity and Excellence".
Feb 2003	Working Group on 14-19 Reform set up.
Feb 2003	Universities UK response to the Communication from the European Commission "The role of universities in the Europe of knowledge".
Mar 2003	DfES Paper "Widening participation in Higher Education"
22 Mar 2003	DfES announces terms of Reference for Schwartz fair admissions review to Parliament.
Apr 2003	Universities UK's response to White Paper "The Future of HE".
Apr 2003	SCOP's response to White Paper "The Future of HE".
Apr 2003	Universities UK's Submission to the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration.
Spring 2003	Establishment of HLPF.
June 2003	SCOP response to DfES Paper "Widening participation in Higher Education" and position paper on fair admissions.
June 2003	Start of work of Schwartz Committee on (fair) admissions to HE.
13 June 2003	Alan Johnson is appointed as new Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education.
16 July 2003	Working Group on 14-19 Reform: Progress Report.
Sept 2003	UK "Position Statement on the Bologna process: Berlin Ministerial Summit 18-19 September".
19 Sept 2003	**Berlin communiqué**, signed by Ivan Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Vocational Education, on behalf of Kim Howells, on behalf of Charles Clarke.
Sept – Nov 2003	First phase of consultation on key issues relating to fair admissions to higher education.
Oct 2003	UUK and SCOP, with support from HEFCE, commission Burgess Report.
27 Oct 2003	Universities UK publishes position on proposals of Working Group on 14-19 Reform.
Dec 2003	Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration: Final Report.

12 Dec 2003	SCOP welcomes DfES proposal to grant university title to teaching-excellent HEIs.
Jan 2004	Sir Alan Wilson becomes Director General of the HE Directorate.
Jan 2004	Draft Higher Education Act 2004 is submitted to Parliament.
Jan 2004	UK HE Europe Unit is launched.
Feb 2004	Universities UK spending review submission 2004 "Achieving our vision".
17 Feb 2004	Working Group on 14-19 Reform: Interim Report.
17 Feb 2004	Universities UK response to Working Group on 14-19 reform Interim Report.
17 Feb 2004	UK HE Europe Unit publishes note on Berlin Summit.
Mar 2004	Universities UK publishes response to the Lambert Review.
25 Mar 2004	UK HE Europe Unit publishes note on Diploma Supplement, encouraging HEIs to implement it.
Mar – Apr 2004	Intense discussion on OFFA.
Apr – May 2004	Draft recommendations open second phase of consultations on Schwartz Fair Admissions Report.
May 2004	UK HE Europe Unit publishes "European Elections 2004 Charter for UK HE sector".
28 May 2004	Universities UK response to second phase of consultation of Working group on 14-19 reform.
28 May 2004	SCOP response to second phase of consultation of Working group on 14-19 reform.
June 2004	Draft recommendations of Schwartz fair admissions report published.
June 2004	Peter Williams, Head of QAA, publishes article "Spaghetti Bolognese".
02 June 2004	Universities UK publishes response to consultation on Schwartz Report fair admissions to HE.
10 June 2004	UK HE Europe Unit publishes up-date on Diploma Supplement, including Irish sample form.
01 July 2004	Higher Education Act 2004 receives Royal Assent.
01 – 02 July 2004	First official Bologna seminar in UK: Bologna Learning Outcomes Seminar, Edinburgh.
06 July 2004	Guardian article spreads rumour that "German educational academics say foundation degrees run contrary to the Bologna process".
07 July 2004	UK HE Europe Unit publishes note on "Masters degrees and the Bologna process".
07 July 2004	Universities UK publishes background note and position paper on the occasion of the Debate in House of Lords on Bologna process.

13 July 2004	Keynote speech by Universities UK President Ivor Crewe at the Centre for Reform 5th annual Lecture "UK Universities, Europe and the Globalisation of Higher Education".
14 July 2004	Debate in House of Lords on Bologna process.
15 July 2004	UK HE Europe Unit publishes note on "European engineering initiatives".
Aug 2004	DfES revises criteria for the grant of degree-awarding powers and university title, taking effect as from 01 Sept 2004.
Sept 2004	Schwartz Report on fair admissions to HE is published.
14 Sept 2004	Universities UK press release welcomes Schwartz Report.
15 Sept 2004	UK HE Europe Unit Website launched.
18 Oct 2004	Final Report of Working Group on 14-19 reform is published.
04 Nov 2004	Burgess Report "Measuring and Recording Student Achievement" is published.
01 Dec 2004	DfES commissions HEFCE to advise on establishment of national credit framework.
15 Dec 2004	Clarke is promoted to become the new Home Secretary, and followed by Ruth Kelly as Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

C   Interviewees

Unless otherwise indicated, formal positions are those held by the interviewees at the time of the interview and the interview took place in the organisation's headquarters. Positions held after autumn 2004 are not included.

C1   Europe

As the focus of this study is on national-level policy formulation, I have chosen the interviewees with a view to the national case studies. This section lists those actor and expert interviews that I have also drawn on when writing the Europe chapter. As all of these are at the same time actors or experts in a national context, they are also listed under the respective country sections.

Prof. Dr. Claude Allègre, former Minister in charge of HE *(Ministre de l'éducation nationale, de la recherche et de la technologie)* (06/1997-04/2000), now Professor, Paris Geophysical Institute (*Institut de Physique du Globe*, IPGP), Interview 7 October 2004, 11.00-11.30, Institut de Physique du Globe, Paris.

Professor Roderick Floud, President, London Metropolitan University (since 04/2004); Board member, EUA (since 03/2001); Member, Quality Working Group, EUA (since 2002); former President, Universities UK (08/2001-07/2003); former Vice-President and Chair of England and Northern Ireland Council, CVCP/Universities UK (08/1998-08/2001); former British Council member of CRE (1998-2001). Interview 26 October 2004, 14.15-15.45, London Metropolitan University.

Prof. Hans Rainer Friedrich, former Director General, Department of HE & FE, 1990 - 11/2002, 19 July 2004, 11.00-14.15, Erzbergerufer, Bonn.

Prof. Eric Froment, Délégué Générale (09/1998-01/2000), CPU; CRE treasurer (until 1998) and President of the EUA (since 03/2001). Interview 06 October 2004, 10.00-11.30, CSO, Paris.

Dr. Marlies Leegwater-van der Linden, Coordinator Policy Analysis and Quality. Dutch representative of the Joint Quality Initiative. Interview 21 September 2004, 14.30-16.00.

Dr. Hermann Müller-Solger, Head, Higher Education Unit (12/2002 – 8/2004), Unit Head „European affairs and other international relations" (1987-2000), Chairman of the Education Commission of the Council of the European Union in Brussels (1999), Sub-Unit Head "International, comparative analyses" (2000 – 2002). 19 July 2004, 16.15-17.10, BMBF, Bonn.

Colin Tück, Member of the Executive Board (since 11/2003), Member of the Committee on International Affairs (07-10/2003) and the Committee on Educational Reform (since 11/2004) of the fzs. Member of the National Bologna Follow-up Group (since 05/2004). 04 August 2004, 13.00-15.30, CHE, Gütersloh.

Mr. Chris Weavers, Member of the National Executive Committee and Vice-President of Education, NUS (07/2002 - 06/2004) and Member of the ESIB Executive Committee (2004), former Co-Chair, ESIB Education Working Group (10/2002-11/2003), Interview 29 October 2004, 10.00-11.30 a.m., Parliament, London.

C2   Germany

Actor interviews

Akkreditierungsrat. Prof. Dr. Hans-Uwe Erichsen, Chairman (since 07/2002); Vice-Chairman (07/1999-06/2002), President of the HRK (08/1990-07/1997), President of the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences (01/1996 – 06/1999), Vice-President of the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences (07/1999 – 07/2000). 26 July 2004, 15.00-17.00, University Münster.

BDA. Stefan Küpper, Head of Department of Education Policy (Abteilungsleiter Bildungspolitik, Gesellschaftspolitik und Grundsatzfragen). 23 July 2004, 10.00-11.15, Telephone.

BMBF. --- *Prof. Hans Rainer Friedrich*, former Director General, Department of HE & FE (1990 - 11/2002), former Chair of the German Bologna Follow-up Group (05/2001 - 11/2002), 19 July 2004, 11.00-14.15, Erzbergerufer, Bonn. --- Ministerialdirigent Christoph Ehrenberg, Director General, Department of HE & FE (since 11/2002), before that *Kanzler* (registrar) at the University Osnabrück. 11 October 2004, 15.00-16.00, BMBF, Berlin. --- *Dr. Hermann Müller-Solger*, Head, Higher Education Unit (12/2002 – 8/2004), Unit Head „European affairs and other international relations" (1987-2000), Chairman of the Education Commission of the Council of the European Union in Brussels (1999), Sub-Unit Head "International, comparative analyses" (2000-2002). 19 July 2004, 16.15-17.10, BMBF, Bonn.

DAAD. Group interview with: --- *Dr. Heinz L. Nastansky*, Group 21: Programmes on intenationalisation of HEIs, and, in an interim function, international and doctoral programmes (internationally-oriented degree programmes, Master Plus, PhD) --- *Dr. Sebastian Fohrbeck*, Group 31: Western Europe, North America, --- *Dr. Siegbert Wuttig*: Group 33: EU programmes (Leonardo, Sokrates/Erasmus, Tempus, Bologna Process etc). 22 July 2004, 14.00-15.30, Wissenschaftszentrum, Bonn.

DHV. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Kempen, President. 15 June 2004, 12.30-14.00, CHE, Gütersloh.

fzs. Colin Tück, Member of the Executive Board (since 11/2003), Member of the Committee on International Affairs (07-10/2003) and the Committee on Educational Reform (since 11/2004) of the fzs. Member of the National Bologna Follow-up Group (since 05/2004). 04 August 2004, 13.00-15.30, CHE, Gütersloh.

hlb. Prof. Dr. Nicolai Müller-Bromley, President. 28 July 2004, 10.00-12.00, *Fachhochschule* Osnabrück.

HRK. --- *Prof. Dr. med. Gaehtgens*, President (since 08/2003). 24 August 2004, 10.00-11.15, Telephone. --- *Prof. Dr. Klaus Landfried*, former President (08/1997-08/2003). 19 August 2004,

13.00-15.00, Heidelberg. --- *Prof. Dr. Erhard Mielenhausen*, Vice-President and Spokesperson of the Members' Group *Fachhochschulen* since 08/2000, Member of the *Wissenschaftsrat* (since 1995), President of the *Fachhochschule* Osnabrück (since 1994). 28 July 2004, 15.00-17.00, *Fachhochschule* Osnabrück.

KMK. --- *Hartmut Krebs*, Chairperson of the Working Group of Chiefs of Staff „Structural guidelines Bachelor and Masters programmes" (since 2002), State Secretary of the MWF (since 07/2000).[381] 03 August 2004, 14.00-16.00, Düsseldorf. --- *Prof. Dr. Erich Thies*, Secretary General (since 10/1998). 02 November 2004, 9.30-10.30, Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin. --- *Ute Erdsiek-Rave*, Member of *Land* Parliament, Minister of Education, Science, Research and Culture of the *Land* Schleswig Holstein, Delegate of the Federal Council of Germany in the Education Council of the European Union, signed the Bologna declaration on behalf of the *Länder*. 10 September 2004, 10.00-11.00, Telephone.

MWF. LMR Helmut Fangmann, Head of Department "General Issues of Higher Education System" (since 05/2002); before that Senior Vice Principal (*Kanzler*), University of Freiburg. 3 August 2004, 10.45 - 12.45, Düsseldorf.

Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft. Dr. Ekkehard Winter, Deputy Secretary General and Member of the Executive Board (since 01/2003), Head of Programmes & Funding (since 01/2000), before that Programme Manager of Higher Education (since 1989). 18 August 2004, 10.00 – 12.00, Telephone.

StMWFK. --- *Hans Zehetmair*, former Minister (10/1990 – 10/2003).[382] 09 September 2004, 10.00-11.30, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Munich. --- *Ministerialrat Günther Megger*, Head of Unit X/4. 09 September 2004, 14.30-15.30, Munich.

Wissenschaftsrat. --- *Dr. Winfried Benz*, former Secretary General (1989 – 01/2002). 29 July 2004, 14.00-15.30, Wissenschaftszentrum, Bonn. --- *Ministerialdirektor Wedig von Heyden*, Secretary General (since 02/2002) Ministerialdirigent, BMBF (until 02/2002). 29 July 2004, 17.00-18.00, Cologne.

Expert interviews

Erik Hansalek, BMBF, Officer (*Referent*), Department 'HE law, HE admissions, HE degrees', 02 July 2004, Telephone; and further consultation via Email.

Dr. Angelika Schade, *Akkreditierungsrat*, Managing Director, 11 February 2005, 15.00-16.00, Telephone; and further consultation via Email.

Andreas Schepers, BMBF, Head of Department 'Student Support, HE law', 22 September 2005, Telephone; and further consultation via Email.

Ministerialrat Dirk Schüller, BMBF, Head of Department 'HE law, HE admissions, HE degrees', 11 February 2005, 14.00-15.00, Telephone; and further consultation via Email.

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[381] From 7/2000-11/2002, the ministry still had responsibility for the school sector as well and was called MSWF (*Ministerium für Schule, Wissenschaft und Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westphalen*).

[382] From 1990-1998, the Ministry's responsibilities still encompassed the school sector and it was called *Staatsministerium für Unterricht, Kultus, Wissenschaft und Kunst*.

Senate Councillor Roland Thierfelder, Head of the Universities Department at the KMK, 28 February 2005, questions and answers via Email.

C3   The Netherlands

Actor interviews

HBO-raad. Den Haag, www.hbo-raad.nl. Prof. dr. Frans Leijnse, President; and drs. Arian van Staa, Director of Policy Development, Interview 22 September 2004, 11.00-12.30.

Inspectie van het Onderwijs. Utrecht, www.owinsp.nl. Group interview with Mr. J.P. (Ko) Scheele, Inspector of Higher Education in the Netherlands (since 1995) and Director of the BaMa-Monitor; and dr. Inge F. de Wolf, Project Manager Research, Interview 14 September 2004, 10.00-12.00.

LSVb. Utrecht, www.lsvb.nl. --- *Mr. Farid Tabarki*, former board member (1997-98), member of the Rinnooy Kan Commission and the Commission Accreditation in HE, ESIB member of the committee on Prague (2000-01) and chairman of the board meetings (2000-03), Groenlinks member of the Executive Committee (2001-05). Interview 14 September 2004, 14.30-16.00. --- *Mr. Johan Bokdam*, former Vice-President (2001-2) and member of the Reneman Commission, Interview 15 September 2004, 17.30-19.00. --- Group interview with *Mr. Jurjen van den Bergh*, former Vice-President (2003-04); and *Ms. Marlies Willemen*, Secretaris, Interview 13 September 2004, 17.00-19.00.[383]

MOCenW. Den Haag, www.minocw.nl. Group interview with Mr. Janco Bonnink, Director for International Affairs, HE Department; and Dr. Marlies Leegwater-van der Linden, Coordinator Policy Analysis and Quality (1998-2004). Dutch representative of the Joint Quality Initiative. Interview 21 September 2004, 14.30-16.00.

Nuffic. Den Haag, www.nuffic.nl. Mr. P.J.C. (Pieter) van Dijk, President, Interview 23 September 2004, 11.00-12.30.

NVAO. Den Haag, www.nvao.net. dr. K.L.L.M. (Karl) Dittrich, Vice-President, Interview 23 September 2004, 14.00-15.30.

Onderwijsraad. Den Haag, www.onderwijsraad.nl. Prof. Dr. Frans A. Van Vught, Council Member. Interview 3 November 2004, 09.00-10.00, Telephone.

VAWO. Den Haag, www.vawo.nl. dr. Helen de Hoop, ex-VAWO Board Member who represented VAWO in the Reneman Commission. Interview 20 September 2004, 12.30-14.00, Nijmegen Station.

VNO-NCW. Den Haag, www.vno-ncw.nl/web/show. drs. A.J.E.G. (Chiel) Renique, Senior Advisor Education and Training, Interview 24 September 2004, 10.00-11.30.

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[383] I also tried hard to get an interview with an appropriate representative of the second major student organisation, ISO, but in vain. I have taken into account their positions based on document analysis.

VSNU. Den Haag, www.vsnu.nl. Mr. E. M. d'Hondt, President; and dr. Jeroen A. Bartelse, Director of Policy, Interview 13 September 2004, 13.30-15.00.

Expert interviews

Prof.dr. Hans P.M. Adriaansens, Dean of University College Utrecht and President of the RMO (Council for Social Development/*Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling*), Den Haag, www.adviesorgaan-rmo.nl. Interview 15 September 2004, 13.30-15.00, Den Haag.

Prof.dr. Robert S. Reneman, former President of the KNAW and of the Reneman Commission, Research Director of CARIM, Maastricht University. Interview 22 September 2004, 13.30-15.30, Den Haag.

Prof.dr. Marijk Van der Wende, Professor Comparative Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), Twente University, Enschede, www.utwente.nl/cheps. Interview 11 September 2004, 12.00-13.00, Telephone.

dr. Jeroen Huisman, Research Co-ordinator, CHEPS. Interviews 2 September 2004, 9.00-10.00, Telephone and 17 September 2004, 14.00-15.15, CHEPS.

drs. Hans Vossensteyn, Research Associate, Student financial support and economics of higher education, CHEPS. Interview 17 September 2004, 12.30-13.45, and further consultation via email afterwards.

dr. Don Westerheijden, Senior Research Associate, Quality management and globalisation, CHEPS. Interview 17 September 2004, 15.30-17.00, and further consultation via email afterwards.

Jorrit Snijder, Policy Advisor, NVAO (see above). Telephone interview 03 November 2005, 9.30-10.30, and further consultation via email afterwards.

C4   France

Actor interviews

ADIUT. Paris, www.iut-fr.net. Mr. Phillipe Pierrot, President, ADIUT; and Director, IUT Longwy, Interview 30 September 2004, 10.00-11.30, IUT de Cachan, Paris.

CDEFI. Paris, www.cdefi.fr. --- *Prof. Jacques Gelas*, Delegate for International Affairs, Standing Commission (*Commission Permanente*), CDEFI; and Professor, École Nationale Supérieure de Chimie de Clermont-Ferrand (ENSCCF). Interview 30 September 2004, 15.30-17.00, Hôtel Lutetia, Paris. --- International Group (*Groupe Internationale*), CDEFI, Group discussion 1 October 2004, 9.30-11.00, École Nationale Supérieure de Chimie de Paris (ENSCP).

CGE. Paris, www.cge.asso.fr. Prof. Daniel Grimm, President, International Group (*Groupe Internationale*), CGE; and Deputy Director (*Directeur-Adjoint*), École Centrale Paris. Interview 5 October 2004, 17.00-18.30, École Centrale Paris.

CPU. Paris, www.cpu.fr/Cpu. --- *Prof. Eric Froment*, General Delegate (*Délégué Générale*) (09/1998-01/2000); CRE treasurer (untill 1998); and President of the EUA (since 03/2001). Interview 06 October 2004, 10.00-11.30, CSO, Paris. --- *Prof. Bernard Belloc*, Vice-President (*Vice-Président*) (12/2000-2002). Interview 07 October 2004, 8.30-10.00, CPU, Paris. --- *Mr. Dominitien Debouzie*, President of the Commission for Education and Life-long Learning (*Président de la Commission de la Pédagogie et de la Formation Permanente*); and President, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Villeurbanne, Interview 29 September 2004, 14.00-15.30, Gare de Lyon, Paris.

La FAGE. Paris, www.fage.asso.fr/index_lafage.php. Mr. Yann Soucaze, Vice President, La FAGE Representative at CNESER, Interview 08 October 2004, 16.00-17.30, Paris.

MEDEF. Paris, www.medef.fr. Mr. Maurice Pinkus, MEDEF Representative at CNESER, and Delegated Director (*Directeur délégué*), Union des Industries et Métiers de la Métallurgie (L'UIMM), member of Duby Commission, member of Follow-up Commission of *licence professionnelle* and *master*. Interview 5 October 2004, 10.00-11.30, IUMM, Paris.

MEN. Paris, www.education.gouv.fr. --- *Prof. Dr. Claude Allègre*, former Minister in charge of HE *(Ministre de l'éducation nationale, de la recherche et de la technologie)* (06/1997-04/2000), now Professor, Paris Geophysical Institute (*Institut de Physique du Globe*, IPGP), Interview 7 October 2004, 11.00-11.30, Institut de Physique du Globe, Paris. --- *Dr. Lore Meynadier*, former Cabinet member of Minister Claude Allègre; Liaison person between Cabinet and the Ministry's HE Directorate; Secretary of Attali Commission (1997-2000), Interview 7 October 2004, 11.30-13.30, Institut de Physique du Globe, Paris. --- *Ms. Francine Demichel*, former Director of the HE Directorate (*Directrice de l'Enseignement Supérieur*) (1997-2002). Interview 9 October 2004, 9.30-12.00, Paris. --- *Mr. Jean-Pierre Korolitski*, Vice-Director of the HE Directorate (*Adjoint au Directeur de l'Enseignement Supérieur*), Interview 28 September 2004, 14.30-16.00.

MSTP. Paris, www.recherche.gouv.fr/mstp. Ms. Marie-Claude Dauchel, Programme Officer Masters programmes (*Chargée de mission Masters*), Interview 6 October 2004, 14.00-15.30.

SNESUP. Paris, www.snesup.fr. Ms. Michelle Lauton, SNESUP Representative at CNESER, Interview 29 October 2004, 10.30-12.00.

UNEF. Paris, www.unef.fr. Mr. Raphaël Chambon, UNEF National Board Member, University Commission (*Commission Universitaire*), UNEF Representative at CNESER, Interview 7 October 2004, 17.30-19.00.

Expert interviews

Mr. Etienne Cazin, Coordinator of the European and Middle East Area Networks, Edufrance (since 2003), Paris, www.edufrance.fr. Telephone Interview 05 August 2005, 15.30-16.15 and further consultation via email.

Mr. Bruno Curvale, Programme Officer (*Chargé de mission*) and Evaluation Coordinator, CNE, Paris. www.cne-evaluation.fr. Interview 21 June 2004, 9.30-11.30, and further consultation via email.

Prof. Dr. Pierre Dubois, Sociologist, Université de Marne-la-Vallée, Telephone Interview 23 August 2005, 16.00-16.30.

Mr. Patrick Franjou, Programme Officer, European relations (*Chargé de mission pour les relations européennes*) CPU, (see above). Interview 21 June 2004, 17.00-18.30.

Ms. Nicole Nicolas, Programme Officer, Education and Life-long learning (*Chargée de mission pour la pédagogie et la formation continue*), CPU. Interview 22 June 2004, 14.30-16.00; and further consultation via Email.

Mr. Sylvain Kahn, Director of European Affairs (since 03/2001), Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Sciences Po), Paris, www.sciences-po.fr and former member of the Cabinets of Claude Allègre and Jack Lang (11/1998-03/2001). Interview 26 June 2004, 14.00-15.30, Sciences Po, Paris.

Mr. Thierry Malan, Inspecteur Général, IGAENR, Paris, www.education.gouv.fr/syst/igaen/default.htm. Interview 28 September 2004, 10.00-12.00.

Mr. René Paul Martin, Programme Office International Relations (*Chargé de mission pour les Relations Internationales*), CTI. Toulouse, www.commission-cti.fr/. Interview 25 June 2004, 13.30-14.00, Sciences Po.

Dr. Christine Musselin, Research Director, CSO (*Centre de Sociologie des Organisations*), Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Sciences Po), Paris, www.cso.edu/site/. Interview 23 June 2004, 9.30-11.00; and further consultation via email.

Ms. Stéphanie Mignot-Gérard, Doctoral student, CSO (see above), Interview 23 June 2004, 11.00-12.30; and further consultation via email.

Ms. Pauline Ravinet, Doctoral student, CSO (see above), Interview 23 June 2004, 14.00-15.30; and further consultation via Email.

Ms. Patricia Pol, Programme Officer of Université Paris XII at Edufrance (*chargée de mission*) (until 2002), Vice-President in charge of international relations, Université Paris XII, Val de Marne; and Coordinator of the French team of Bologna promotors. Interview 24 June 2004, 10.30-11.30, Université Paris XII, Paris.

C5   England

Actor interviews

DfEE/DfES, London, www.dfes.gov.uk. --- *Baroness Tessa Blackstone*, former Minister of State for Education and Employment (1997-2001), now Vice Chancellor, University of Greenwich. Telephone interview 10 November 2004, 14.00-15.00 --- *Sir Alan Wilson*, Director General, Higher Education Directorate (since 01/2004), former Vice Chancellor of Leeds, Interview 27 October 2004, 16.00-17.30 --- *Mr. Andy Walls*, Bologna contact person and head of the international students team (03/1999-11/2004), responsible for preparing the UK government papers on Bologna, Interview 27 October 2004, 10.00-11.00.

UK HE Europe Unit, London, www.universitiesuk.ac.uk. --- Ms. Tish Bourke, Manager, Interview 20 October 2004, 15.30-17.00, and further email exchange afterwards.

HEFCE, Bristol, www.hefce.ac.uk. --- *Ms. Liz Beaty*, Director, Learning and Teaching, Interview 21 October 2004, 11.30-13.00, HEFCE London office. --- *Mr. John Rushforth*, Director, Widening Participation, Interview 21 October 2004, 9.00-10.30, HEFCE London office.

NUS, London, www.nus.org.uk. --- Mr. Chris Weavers, Member of the National Executive Committee and Vice-President of Education, NUS (07/2002 - 06/2004) and Member of the ESIB Executive Committee (2004), former Co-Chair, ESIB Education Working Group (10/2002-11/2003), Interview 29 October 2004, 10.00-11.30, Parliament, London

SCOP, London, www.scop.ac.uk. --- Ms. Patricia Ambrose, Executive Secretary, Interview 29 October 2004, 14.30-16.00; and further consultation via Emai.

Universities UK, London, www.universitiesuk.ac.uk. --- *Professor Roderick Floud*, President, London Metropolitan University (since 04/2004); Board member, EUA (since 03/2001); Member, Quality Working Group, EUA (since 2002); former President, Universities UK (08/2001-07/2003); former Vice-President and Chair of England and Northern Ireland Council, CVCP/Universities UK (08/1998-08/2001); former British Council member of CRE (1998-2001). Interview 26 October 2004, 14.15-15.45, London Metropolitan University. --- *Dr. Geoffrey Copland*, Vice-Chancellor and Rector, University of Westminster, London; and Chairman, England and Northern Ireland Council, Universities UK, London (since August 2003), Interview 26 October 2004, 10.00-11.30, University of Westminster, London. --- *Professor Robert Boucher*, Vice-Chancellor, University of Sheffield; Board member, Universities UK (since 2001); Chair, International Strategy Group, Universities UK (since 1997). Interview 22 October 2004, 12.30-13.15.

QAA, Gloucester, www.qaa.ac.uk. --- *Mr. Peter Williams*, Chief Executive (since 2001), Interview 18 October 2004, 11.00-12.30, QAA London Office. --- *Mr. Nick Harris*, Director, Development and Enhancement Group, Interview 25 October 2004, 12.00-13.30, Gloucester, and further email exchange afterwards. --- *Ms. Carolyn Campbell*, Assistant Director International, Interview 28 October 2004, 10.30-12.00., QAA London Office, and further email exchange afterwards.

Expert interviews

Bahram Bekhradnia, Director, HEPI, Oxford, www.hepi.ac.uk. Telephone interviews 9 August 2004, 17.00-18.00; and 26 August 2004, 10.00-11.00, consultation in writing February 2006.

Peter Findlay, Assistant Director, Review Group, QAA, Telephone interview, 6 May 2004, 15.00-16.00; and further email exchange afterwards.

Professor Lee Harvey, Director, Centre for Research and Evaluation, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, www.shu.ac.uk. Interview 18 September 2004, 13.30-15.00, Twente University; and further email exchange afterwards.

Paul Norris, Operations Manager, and Duncan Hamshere, Team Leader Information Service, UK NARIC, Cheltenham, www.naric.org.uk. Interview 25 October 2004, 15.00-17.00.

John Reilly, Director, UK Sokrates-Erasmus Council, Canterbury, www.erasmus.ac.uk. Telephone interview 10 November 2004, 10.00-11.00.

Professor Peter Scott, Board member (since 12/2000), HEFCE, Bristol, www.hefce.ac.uk and Vice-Chancellor, Kingston University, Kingston-upon-Thames, www.kingston.ac.uk. Interview 30 April 2004, 10.00-11.00, Berlin; Telephone interview, 20 December 2006, 15.00-15.45; and further email exchange afterwards.

Marion Séguret, Senior Policy Adviser, Skills, Pensions & Employment Group, Human Resources Policy Directorate, Confereration of British Industry (CBI), www.cbi.org.uk/. Telephone interview, 16 March 2006, 9.00-9.30.

Jane Tory, DfES, Department of HE, responsible for quality systems, credits, teaching & learning. Telephone interview 20 December 2004, 15.30-16.00.

Professor Paul Trowler, Professor of Higher Education and Head, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, Lancaster, www.lancs.ac.uk. Interview 6 September 2004, Barcelona.

D   Interview guideline

Presentation

- Explain my role (two hats: policy hat and research hat)

- Explain purpose and use of interviews

- Explain assumption of ACI: equation of views of interviewee and organisation

- Ask if taping is o.k. and discuss further proceeding: ask if permission is needed for verbatim quotes.

Introduction

1. How do you see the role of your organisation with respect to the introduction of Bachelor and Masters programmes (BMP)/ LMD/the Bologna process?[384]

2. How do you see your personal role in the work on BMP/LMD/the Bologna process within your organisation?

3. How important is the topic "introduction of BMP/LMD/the Bologna process" for your organisation, also compared to other topics?

Preferences & Perceptions

1. What has been your organisation's position towards the introduction of BMP/LMD/the Bologna declaration in the period from 1998 to present?

Open: From your perspective, what are the main reasons for your organisation/constituency to be in favour of/opposed to the introduction of BMS?

Probe: What are the major opportunities from the perspective of your organisation/constituency?

Probe: What are the major risks from the perspective of your organisation/constituency?

2. I would like to go into more detail and ask questions about a number of aspects. Which opportunities and risks do you see with respect to the following dimensions in relation with the introduction of BMP/LMD/the Bologna declaration?

Curricula & teaching- and learning practice (probes: i.e., predominant educational goals and perceptions of what constitutes academic quality, and according ways of organising HE curricula and teaching, such as the balancing of breadth and depth, facts and methodology, student freedom and guidance, research- and labour-market orientation, the length of studies and the enforcement of time limits);

The relationship between different types of HEIs (probes: i.e., the relative role and status of institutions and the way the functions of education versus training and elite versus mass education are distributed);

The relationship between HE and the labour market (probes: i.e., including conceptions of employability, professional entry regulations and recruitment practices, and the mobility between the two systems);

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[384] In Germany and the Netherlands, ask for: "BMP", in France: "LMD", in England: "the Bologna process".

Access & selection (probes: i.e., the transition from school to university and the selectivity of programmes at Bachelor and Masters level, respectively);

Study funding and fees, i.e., the way HE (not research!) is funded, with particular reference to cost-cutting measures and fees;

Curricular governance, i.e., who has a say about curricula and how central or decentralised decision-making upon them is organised.

3. Has your organisation changed its view on this over time?

4. To conclude: Would you like to mention any other areas touched by the introduction of BMP/LMD/the Bologna process?

Interaction orientations, actor constellations & modes of interaction

1. In which bodies regarding the policy formulation on BMP/LMD/the Bologna agenda did you participate; where have and haven't you been heard?

2. In your view, which are the moments in which important political decisions have been taken with respect to BMP/LMD/the Bologna agenda and what is your position towards them?

3. In your view, which organisations have crucially shaped the patterns of BMP in this country?

Probes: any others?

4. Which of these organisations have you worked most closely with?

Has this changed over time?

5. Which of these organisations have held views similar to the view of your organisation, which have held notably different views?

Has this changed over time?

6. Could you bring them into a rank order with respect to their influence?

7. How would you characterise the policy formulation process on BMP/LMD/the Bologna agenda in your country: Most issues decided unilaterally by the state, by negotiation between the actors in HE policy, or left uncoordinated?

National versus European

1. Open: In your perception, what lies at the heart of the Bologna process? In essence, what is it all about?

Open: has this (view) changed over time?

2. What role does the European agenda of the Bologna process play for your organisation/constituency?

3. How would you describe the relative importance of national and international reasons for engaging in the introduction of BMP/LMD/adaptations of degree structures? Which motives were dominant?

4. In your perception, is there a European "model" of degree structures (emerging)? If so, how does it look like?

5. Do you perceive the model in your country to be in line with this European "model"?

If not, in what ways? What are the consequences?

6. How do you regard the role of the European Union in this?

Degree of change

1. How significant do you judge the degree of change brought about by the introduction of BMP/LMD/the Bologna declaration in your country so far?

2. In which areas do you see a lot of change? In which areas do you see little change? Probe: Seven dimensions (e.g. Curricula and teaching & learning practice, the relationship of institutional types, the relationship of HE and the labour market, access & selection; the governance of curricula, funding & fees)

3. With respect to the introduction of BMS/LMD/adaptations of degree structures, do you expect significantly more change in the future?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you want to add or emphasise with respect to the topic of BMP/LMD/the Bologna declaration?

2. Can you give me feedback on this interview? Did you have difficulties with certain questions?

Thank you for this interview.

References

Note: Page numbers of quotations in the main text refer to the sources listed here. Whereever the original is in a language other than English, direct quotations have been translated. - Those interviews quoted or directly referred to in the text are included in the references; for a full list of all interviews, see appendix C.

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