

## Introduction

Chapters four to twelve have presented the situation with regard to the most important dividing lines between higher education sectors and higher education institutions in each of the national systems involved in the project, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Flanders, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In this comparative analysis thematic comparisons are made. The leading themes chosen in the descriptions of each country – input, structural features, other features of the system, output and developments, recent or otherwise – have also been the guiding thread in the analysis in this chapter. Frequently it is the position of the Dutch higher education system in relation to the other systems that forms the point of departure for the thematic comparisons. At the end of the chapter the thematic elements are brought together by way of reflecting on the general position of the Dutch system in relation to the other systems.

## Input

### *Size of the sectors*

A striking feature of the Dutch higher education sector is that it is significantly larger than the university sector. Figure 1.1 gives an overview of the size of the sectors in the countries in the study expressed in terms of student numbers by sector.

**Figure 1.1:** Distribution of student population by type of institution (1996, headcount)

	university	%	non university	%
Austria	231311	98%	3756	2%
Denmark	52004	30%	123955	70%
Finland	137173	76%	44339	24%
Flanders	58467	38%	94140	62%
France	1132888	58%	834854	42%
Germany	1395386	76%	442018	24%
Netherlands	165880	37%	278253	63%
Sweden	441069	100%		
United Kingdom	1392607	100%		

In Flanders too the non-university sector is larger than the university sector and the situation is comparable with that in the Netherlands. In Denmark the MVU sector (courses of medium length) is significantly larger than the university sector. If we look at the MVU and the KVU (short courses) sector together, the share of the non-university sector is actually larger than in the Netherlands. In all other countries the university sector is considerably larger than the other sector or sectors. The size very much depends on the breadth of the courses on offer. In systems where the other sector or sectors are of a limited size, the courses on offer are, on the whole, fewer in terms of the number of disciplines or subjects available in the sector. This is for example the case in Austria and Finland and to a lesser degree in Germany.

#### *Admission*

The Dutch higher education system makes a clear distinction between those admitted to higher vocational education and those admitted to university. Two different routes in secondary education –HAVO/MBO and VWO– prepare students for training at *hogescholen* or university respectively. The distinction becomes a little more vague because those with a pre-university school diploma (VWO) are allowed to attend a *hogeschool* (providing HBO or higher vocational courses) while those with a first year certificate or a final diploma from a hogeschool may attend university.

The situation in Germany largely corresponds with that in the Netherlands. The *Fachhochschulreife* allows students to be admitted to a *Fachhochschule* but not university. A *Hochschulreife* permits students to go to both a *Fachhochschule* and a university. The systems in Austria, Flanders and Sweden all generally have the same admission requirements for the different higher education sectors. A general secondary education certificate admits students to different forms of higher education. These countries clearly differ from the Netherlands. The comparison between Denmark, France and the United Kingdom on the one hand and the Netherlands on the other makes it clear that these three foreign systems allow general admission on the basis of a general secondary school qualification. However, in addition to the general admission requirement the individual establishments apply various selection mechanisms (the *concours* in France, *A-levels* in the United Kingdom). As a result there are differences of status between establishments and/or sectors. In France and Denmark, to a limited degree, these differences mainly apply between the sectors, while in the United Kingdom the differences in status apply to the institutions.

Besides the qualifying certificates and the selection process, all the systems set specific standards of candidates relating to the content of the course to be taken in the higher education establishment. Every system, admittedly with some variation in the form of the requirements, has some kind of set subjects or standard criteria, similar to those in the Netherlands. In most systems as well skills are required, for example in the artistic, creative or physical domain in the case of music, dance or physical training courses for instance.

## Structural features

### *Length of courses*

In the mid-eighties a fixed nominal length was set in Dutch sectors for courses in the first phase. Since then exceptions have been introduced to this rule. Many university agricultural and technology courses of study currently take five years and in the higher vocational sector there are a number of short programmes lasting two years. Even so the impression of a uniform period of study or training largely remains intact. In the United Kingdom courses are of uniform length and there is no distinction between the former polytechnics and the old universities. In Austria, Germany and Flanders there is clearly more variation in the length of courses, depending on the sector or the type of institution at which the course is offered. The variation is greatest between the types of establishment in Denmark, France and Sweden.

### *Certificates and degrees*

There is scarcely any difference in the types of certificates and/or degrees by sector among the higher education systems examined. The sector in which a student has attended a course can almost automatically be gathered from the certificate obtained or the degree. The United Kingdom is an exception to this because the former polytechnics and the universities, which are now all part of the university sector, award nominally identical certificates and degrees.

### *Vocational as opposed to academic*

The difference between vocational and academic courses is only a gradual one in the majority of higher education systems: none of the systems has a very close correlation between type of course and sector. On the whole the university sector emphasises academically-oriented courses and the other sectors frequently place more emphasis on vocationally-oriented courses. However, many establishments in the university sector also provide vocationally-oriented courses. Moreover the distinction between courses, which are focused on teaching based on scientific research and on scientific/academic knowledge is sometimes a difficult one to make. The situation is most diffuse in Sweden, while in the Austrian system there would seem to be a fairly sharp distinction between academic courses (provided by the universities) and vocational courses (provided by the *Fachhochschulen*). In Flanders the distinction would not so much seem to be between the university sector and *hogescholen* sector, but within the latter sector between the courses comprising a single cycle (vocationally-oriented) and the courses involving two cycles (based on scientific/academic knowledge).

### *Doctorates*

There is a very clear difference between the university and other sectors in all the countries examined with regard to the possibility of studying for a doctorate. This entitlement is the sole preserve of the university sector in practically all countries.<sup>3</sup> This does not incidentally always mean that the only candidates admitted are those with a university (Master's) degree. In many countries

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<sup>3</sup> There are exceptions to this rule - often historically determined - for example non-university church institutions which are also entitled to offer training leading to a doctorate.

graduates from non-university institutions may also prepare themselves to take a doctorate although in practice the great majority do have a university degree.

#### *Research*

The difference between sectors which offer candidates the possibility of doing research for a doctorate, is closely connected with the distinction made in the systems between carrying out fundamental and/or applied research. In the United Kingdom the existing differences were abolished by law in 1992. In practice, however, there is still a clear distinction between the former polytechnics and the 'old' universities when it comes to the share of fundamental research and the number of PhD students. Sweden is the exception as regards the monopoly of courses for PhD students and carrying out fundamental research. Some university colleges recently acquired the right to award the degree of doctor and carry out fundamental research (some establishment-wide others within certain disciplines). Thus although fundamental research is primarily the preserve of the university sectors, the non-university sectors, in the systems studied, do carry out applied research, though usually to a limited degree, financed from sources such as local and regional governments and industry.

#### *Intermediary qualifications*

Intermediary qualifications barely exist in the Netherlands (despite the legal opening of introducing such qualifications in the university sector. A comparable situation exists in Denmark where the Bachelor degree is a formal intermediary qualification but which is barely regarded by students and employers as a qualification for the labour market. Sweden, the United Kingdom and France (to a certain extent) do have intermediary qualifications, training students for a position on the labour market and for admission to further training in higher education. The other systems do have intermediary diplomas, but these do not provide a qualification for the labour market. They simply indicate that a certain part of the course has been completed (for example the *kandidaats* in Flanders and the *Grundstudium* in Germany).

#### *Cooperation between sectors*

The Netherlands and Flanders (and to some degree Sweden) are examples of countries where cooperation between institutions in the different sectors, for example in the field of joint curriculum development, coordinating transfers between courses in different sectors and the use of each others infrastructure, occurs fairly frequently. Austria and Denmark are examples of higher education systems where there is barely any interaction at all between the different sectors.

### Other features

#### *Funding*

The government is a major funder of the university sectors in the higher education systems examined. Besides government funds universities frequently receive donations from central research budgets, which are often managed by

research councils, on a competitive basis. Sweden is an exception in the sense that university colleges may compete for funds from research councils. The degree to which university sectors raise funds from contract activities besides government funding differs sharply from country to country and institution to institution.

The funding of non-university sectors is more varied than that of the university sectors. Some non-university sectors (for example in the Netherlands, Denmark and Flanders) are heavily funded by the government. A limited portion of revenue comes from funds raised from contract activities. The recently created vocationally-oriented sectors in Austria and Finland would seem to have a different mix when it comes to fund-raising. In these countries regional and local government make a major contribution to financing the *Fachhochschulen* and the AMKs. The said sectors also have a private or quasi-private basis more frequently than the education systems where the vocational sector has existed for a longer period.

Differences in (public) funding systems are inextricably linked with the performance or not of fundamental and/or applied research (see also above). Those institutions which are deemed to carry out fundamental research and which offer doctorates, are funded in a different way to those institutions which do not have this responsibility.

#### *Legislation*

As regards legislation the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom have comprehensive legislation which applies to the entire higher education system. The other countries have separate legislation for the different sectors. The German system is somewhat different to the rest because there is both legislation for the federal system and for the *Länder*. The national legislation provides the general framework and the details are filled in regionally so that differences between the *Länder* (often minor) do arise. Which Ministry has the say on the subject of higher education is frequently a historical question. Some systems have a separate ministry of education while in other systems higher education comes under the ministry of education and science, education and culture, agriculture, and/or education and transport, either in full or in part.

#### *Personnel*

The way staff are organised in the various sectors depends very much on whether they do any research. Sectors in which this is the case are usually structured in a classical, hierarchical manner with professors, associate professors, university lecturers and PhDs. For the senior posts potential candidates as a rule are required to have a doctorate. The more vocationally-oriented sectors have more varied personnel categories but the common denominator is that the majority of the staff are required to have relevant professional experience.

#### *Quality assurance*

On the whole major differences exist in the approach to quality care in the various countries depending on whether there is a national system or not (varying from internal quality care and external review to accreditation). Flanders and the Netherlands have similar systems of quality care and inspec-

tion in both sectors but the organisation of the processes in the different sectors is in different hands. In France, Sweden, Denmark (recently) and the United Kingdom system-wide organisations are responsible for maintaining standards in higher education. Germany does not have a national system. There is a national accreditation system but this is provisionally only applicable to the new Bachelor and Master programmes. Implementation of accreditation in the *Länder* may differ. The difference in approach between the sectors in Austria is great. The university sector has a traditional system of internal quality care while the *Fachhochschulen* are subject to an accreditation system.

## Output

### *Labour market*

It will come as no surprise to learn that the position of higher education graduates on the labour market is significantly better than that of the unskilled or semi-skilled. The differences between the higher education sectors in the various countries is sometimes minor (as is the case at the moment in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark) and sometimes major (as in France where the difference in unemployment percentages between universities (10%) and *Grand ecoles* (3%) is striking). Little is known of the 'rating' of the different types of graduates by the labour market, apart from some insight into starting salaries. A positive rating was given in Finland and Austria to those coming from AMKs and *Fachhochschulen*. Now that the first cohorts of graduates have arrived on the labour market it would appear that employers are satisfied with the quality of the candidates. The picture in other countries is much more diffuse; there are frequently very great differences between the disciplines within sectors and between sectors.

### *Final qualifications and transfers*

The structure of the systems determine to a significant degree whether the certificates and degrees awarded constitute a final qualification for students. France and Denmark – and to a lesser degree the Netherlands – have higher education systems where (interim) transfers to another sector are a common phenomenon. In the United Kingdom, Finland and Austria the certificate or degree awarded within a certain sector is viewed much more frequently as a final qualification. Transfer to another sector in the system occurs much less frequently.

## Developments

### *Tensions between sectors*

Reference was made in the introductory chapter to the fact that regular tensions arise between the various sectors in many systems (see also Meek *et al.*, 1996). Many of the explanations for the conflicts – and sometimes for the ultimate disappearance of dividing lines between sectors – are attributable to what is known as academic drift, i.e. the attempt of the non-university sector to achieve the much higher status of the university sector. However, this

explanation does not do justice to the dynamism observed in the higher education systems studied. The explanation places too much emphasis on the acquisition of higher status while there are also indications that university sectors too are tending to expand their territory in the direction of providing more vocationally-oriented courses, for example in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France. The point should be made here that the majority of university sectors have traditionally already provided vocationally-oriented courses. The explanation based on academic drift does not do justice either to the situation in a number of countries where it has been demonstrated that it is perfectly possible to maintain a distinction between the sectors by means of a specific set of instruments (financing mechanisms, legislation). The situation in Finland and Austria – and in the Netherlands to a lesser degree – illustrate this point. These higher education systems demonstrate that it is quite possible to allocate tasks and functions to individual sectors without this leading for the time being to major tensions within the system.

#### *Bologna declaration*

Recent developments in the systems would seem to be exacerbating the existing conflicts. On the whole proposed changes to the structure such as the introduction of the Bachelor/Master system, in those arrangements with a clear division of responsibilities between the sectors, gives rise to little debate and few problems. It should be added that as yet few political initiatives and initiatives on the part of the institutions have been taken in a number of systems (for example in Flanders and France) for one thing because of the recent nature of the Bologna declaration. In higher education systems where tension between the sectors already existed and where the merits of the division was a political issue from time to time (for example in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany), the developments relating to the Bachelor/Master structure have been latched on to as material to fuel further debate. Proponents of the existing separation are making every effort to retain the distinctions, also after implementing the new structure, while opponents question the existing dividing lines.

#### The position of the Dutch higher education system

Looking at the comparison and analysis one can see that there are both differences and similarities between the Dutch higher education system and the systems of the other countries studied when it comes to the dividing lines between sectors and between higher educational establishments. The Netherlands differs mainly from the other systems because it has two separate preparatory routes leading to the two higher education sectors, negligible differences in the nominal duration of courses and the size of the non-university sector (considerably greater than in the other systems examined). As regards other features of the structure and the system (financing systems, personnel affairs, quality care, position of graduates) the Dutch situation does not significantly differ from that in neighbouring higher education systems. Table 1.1 shows the main features of the Dutch system and to what extent these features are to be found in other countries as well.

**Tabel 1.1:** Features of the Dutch system compared internationally

	NL	A	DK	SF	FL	FR	D	S	UK
Considerable size of non-university sector(s)	X		X		X				*
Separate entry routes	X						X		*
Uniform course duration	X								*
Vocational training not only in non-university sector(s)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*
Degree of doctor only in universities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		*
Applied research in non-university sector(s)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	*
No or barely no intermediate qualifications	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Cooperation between sectors	X				X			X	*
A single legislative regime	X							X	X
Sectoral quality care systems	X	X			X				*

\* These features are not applicable to the present unified system in the United Kingdom.

Comparing the degree of separation (meaning the sharp or more vague dividing lines between sectors) four systems can be defined. At one end of the spectrum are the systems in Austria and Finland where there are extremely clear dividing lines between the systems, both in terms of structural features such as the length of courses and the vocational nature of courses in the non-university sector, and in financing and quality care. These systems can justifiably be described as the new binary systems. At the other end of the spectrum are countries such as the United Kingdom and Sweden where the dividing lines between the sectors either in legislation and/or in practice have become vague. The Netherlands together with Flanders constitute a group between the two extremes. There are clearly dividing lines with regard to a number of structural and system features but there is also a blurring of some of these divisions. A combination of clear and more blurred dividing lines can also be observed in France, Denmark and Germany. The difference between Flanders and the Netherlands and these three other countries are distinctions of degree with regard to individual features. This is the case for approximately the same features of the system in Flanders and in the Netherlands. The sharp and more blurred dividing lines in Germany, Denmark and France apply to a significant degree to different features of the system than in the Netherlands and Flanders.