

Tactful deregulation

Educational policy is a delicate balancing act: measures are always a mix of government regulation and deregulation. The key lies in finding the right balance. The Education Council has conducted a study of the risks and opportunities.

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A review of education policy in the last thirty years shows that many aspects of education are regulated. At the same time, some aspects have been deregulated. The Minister for Education, Culture and Science (Hermans) raised the question of deregulation and increased autonomy for schools to a key policy issue.

Use policy instruments accurately

The Education Council calls on the government to accurately analyse which policy instruments can best be deployed. Sometimes this will mean government regulation, other times it will be better to delegate responsibilities and authorities to other actors. Apart from legislative measures, the government can also use other control mechanisms, such as covenants, subsidies, policy documents and consultation.

Intervene with caution

Deregulation is a long-term process. If the desired effects do not materialise quickly enough, the government will need to show patience. It is also the case that some institutions are better at dealing with autonomy than others; the government must accept these differences.

Strengthen the position of the various actors in education

A policy of deregulation and increasing autonomy gives school governing bodies more freedom. To provide the right balance, the government should strengthen the countervailing powers of parents, pupils, staff and the business community.

Include quality assurance measures

In the Education Council's view, investment should also be made in the policymaking capacity of institutions and local authorities: in terms of human resources, but also in terms of time and training. As the autonomy of institutions increases, so too does the demand for accountability. A system of quality assurance is needed in which institutions have to constantly assess their own quality.