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DRAFT HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PLAN (HOOP) 2000

Summary

The Education Council is an independent advisory body, set up by the act of 15 may 1997 (the Education Council act). The council advises, whether requested to or not, on the main features of the policy and legislation in the field of education. The council advises the ministers of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs and of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries. The upper and lower chambers of the states general can also request recommendations from the council. Local authorities can, in special cases of local education policy, call on the services of the Education Council. The council consists of nineteen members who are appointed in a private capacity.

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SUMMARY Draft higher education and research plan (HOOP) 2000

Recommendations of the Education Council issued to the Minister of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs, dated 3 December 1999. Order number 990663/400.

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Summary

The Higher Education and Research Plan [Hoger onderwijs-en onderzoeksplan] (HOOP) of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science takes social dynamism and its influence on institutions as its point of departure. The institutions are granted a great deal of autonomy. An interpretation whereby the institutions can operate with greater freedom than before is opted for. This could include cancelling the obstruction of administrative mergers between universities and colleges, greater freedom to determine the location of courses and more say in the courses that are provided. To facilitate this greater freedom of action, it is proposed in HOOP that a number of restrictive legal stipulations confining the actions of individual institutions be cancelled.

The Education Council supports the proposal to remove obstructions that hamper the effective operation of institutions. The Council approves of the fact that within HOOP the greater autonomy of the institutions is confined within the framework of explicit government responsibility for the existing order of higher education system as a whole. Within this framework, this responsibility mainly applies to the quality of the education and the research, the accessibility of the education and the effective expenditure of government resources. The Council recommends that these proposals be implemented with caution in view of these responsibilities.

Within the aforementioned frameworks, the Council submits a number of proposals that apply to the organisation of the system of higher education and to an important aspect of quality assurance, i.e. accreditation. Both subjects play an important role in HOOP.

Educational tracks

Prior to that, the Council deals with the varied demand for higher education as noted in HOOP, which calls for more variety and flexibility in the educational tracks within the higher education courses. A number of arguments are mentioned, such as a smoother transition between education and the labour market, reaching more target groups, studying more effectively and the growing variety within the student population. Although the Council can support a government policy geared to adapting preconditions so that various forms of differentiation are possible, some restraint in the number of modalities should be adopted. The limits to the human and financial resources of the institutions must be taken into account.

Cooperation

With regard to the system of higher education, the Council considers it of primary importance that the distinction between higher education and university education continues to be maintained and accentuated. This applies in particular to the differences in the orientation and standard of the education. The Council regards the institutional structure within which this distinction has been expressed up to now as being a meaningful factor.

The Council is of the opinion that the aforementioned distinction can be substantiated from the various intake levels (senior general secondary education / senior secondary vocational education and pre-university education), the demands made by society for graduates highly qualified in various areas, and international developments in qualification structures and titles.

According to the Council, the clarification of the differences will also reinforce the cooperation between higher professional education and university education. This cooperation could also be boosted by improving the quality of higher professional education, for example by setting up a post-initial educational programme in higher professional education, referred to as the professional master level. The Council bases this last proposal on international developments such as the Bologna Declaration in which two cycles are distinguished in higher education, and as far as the Netherlands is concerned this includes higher professional education. Furthermore, the Council sees a possible alternative in this to the unclear system of post-initial courses that have developed outside the regulated existing order.

Master's title

Further to the aforementioned, the Council would like to remark in general that if the suppliers of courses reward these courses with a Master's title on their own authority and grant their graduates the right to use the legally

protected Master's title, these courses will have to be accredited by an independent accreditation body approved by the Council. If not, graduates are not permitted to use this legally protected Master's title.

As far as the financing of the professional Master's course is concerned, the Council is of the opinion that the nature and positioning of this course does not automatically have to lead to full government responsibility for this matter. In view of their responsibility to regulate, the involvement of the institutions in the financing of this educational track is obvious and desirable. The Council deems it conceivable, however, that in some cases the government would decide to allocate public funds. If it is decided in favour of this measure, the Council is of the opinion that this should be in the form of additional financing and that it should not lead to reallocation within the total government budget.

As far as the structure of the university education is concerned, the Council further proposes the introduction of an under-graduate phase of three years at Bachelor level and a graduate phase at Master's level, with a duration varying from one to three years depending on the current duration of the course. The titles (Bachelor and Master of science/arts) should be legally protected. Within the context of the above proposal, this also applies to the titles that should be awarded to the applicable four-year or one-year higher vocational education programmes (professional bachelor or master).

According to the Council, the legally protected titles can only be connected to courses that have been accredited by an accreditation body that, in its opinion, should play an important role in the quality assurance system.

Accreditation system

In line with the proposal in HOOP and in view of government responsibility for a system in which a clear distinction between professional and university education is maintained or introduced, respectively, the Council supports an accreditation system. The accreditation body that must be independent of both the government and the institutions must operate as an extension of the review system. The Council envisages the following tasks for such a body. In the first place, the body determines the qualifications for the orientation and the standard which must be met by the higher education courses if they are to be appointed as higher professional or university education courses. In the second place, the body, other than the review committees, awards recognition or a certain status to the course in question, indicated in HOOP as a formal quality label. Rights and obligations are involved in this accreditation. In the view of the Council, the task of the accreditation body should be to evaluate all existing courses as well as proposals for new courses in vocational and university education at regular intervals, for instance every five or seven years. The issue should be to determine whether or not a number of minimum quality conditions are being met, whereby orientation on internationally applicable quality levels is desirable.

The Council would like to emphasise that it envisages a model that involves as little additional obligations for the institutions as possible. The main features of the procedure could be as follows.

In the event of a positive conclusion, the first evaluation by the accreditation body for new courses (known as *ex ante* evaluation) leads to a provisional accreditation. This does not, however, result in funding: this matter only comes into play as an extension of the next evaluation round (*ex post* evaluation). It is expected that this will prevent institutions from starting new courses too lightly. In order to protect students, the Council does, however, suggest that provisional accreditation should, after marginal testing by the minister, lead him to decide in favour of granting funds.

Ex post evaluations cover all existing courses, including the provisionally accredited courses that have been evaluated *ex ante*. In general, an *ex post* evaluation leads to the continuation or withdrawal of the accreditation. In the latter case, this results in the cancellation of the applicable status, as accreditation is an absolute precondition for allocation or funding. On the other hand, continuation of the accreditation does not automatically result in funding. The question of whether a course will (continue to) be funded by the government does not depend on the accreditation decision.

Only the minister is authorised to make such a decision. Such a decision should take considerations of macro-effectiveness, as currently stipulated in the Higher Education Act [Wet op het hoger onderwijs] (WHW), into account. The Council deems it essential that the accreditation body has a clear and public qualification structure for evaluations. The qualifications must be sectoral (university and higher professional education) and standard specific (Bachelor's and Master's). The body uses information generated by reviews as far as possible.

Voucher system

In conclusion, the Council would like to state that in its view the introduction of a voucher system, as far as HOOP is concerned in higher professional education, cannot be separated from the introduction of an accreditation system. After all, it is essential to have insight into the orientation, the standard and the quality of a course in order to make responsible spending of government resources expressed in vouchers possible. The Council therefore finds that vouchers should only be spent on accredited courses and that an experiment with vouchers should only be conducted when greater clarity has been established about the organisation of the accreditation.

Recommendations issued by the Education Council can be viewed and downloaded from the website:

www.onderwijsraad.nl

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