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Questioning the binary divide: Non-university higher education in Flanders (Belgium)

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Flanders has long had a binary system of higher education. While this system is still operating under the influence of governmental higher education policy and actions of the colleges, it has undergone many changes. Since Belgium became a federal state in 1989, the Flemish government has been able to set its own educational policy, and was and is strongly determined to adapt its system of higher education to the developments of the knowledge society and the rise of a neo-liberal view of education in Europe. Therefore, it adopted three important principles: deregulation, autonomy of the institutions of higher education, and quality of education. Fewer rules, it was conjectured, would give the institutions the freedom as well as the responsibility to adapt faster to the demands of the labour market. The state should only establish the framework in which institutions are to act and the financial resources to realize what they have to do. This partial autonomy would make the institutions accountable for the use of the resources and also for the attainment of their objectives. Moreover, they had to provide for their own quality assurance, which was still a system under the control of the government (De Wit & Verhoeven, 2005).

In this paper, I will show how the government created a framework to bring universities and colleges closer to each other, and thus cast the binary divide into question. Although the first few steps in this process had already been taken in the College Decree in 1994, this process was more stimulated by the Bologna Process. Bologna, after all, stressed the internationalisation of higher education with its consequences for the structure of the curriculum and the titles of the diplomas. Within this process, new structures emerged (e.g. associations between universities and colleges), and special financing was provided for the academic upgrading of college curricula. A comparable financing system for universities and colleges was planned. Nevertheless, the binary divide is still present, which inspired VLHORA¹ (2004b) to formulate a four-page list of demands to the new Flemish government

¹ VLHORA (Council of Flemish Institutions of Higher Education) is an official council established by law. All colleges are members of the VLHORA. This council consists of the general directors of the colleges and advises

in July, 2004, in order to bridge this divide. One of these demands was the right to translate *hogeschool* into the English word “university”, if only in their international contacts. The road of the colleges into the academic world will be described here in four sections. First, I will take a look at the structure of the colleges; second, I will give a picture of their governing structure; third, I will discuss their level of autonomy; and fourth, I will highlight their future development and challenges.

1. Structure of the non-university sector

1.1. Non-university higher education within the structure of higher education

The system of higher education in Flanders consists of colleges and universities. Both may be attended by anyone with a diploma of Belgian secondary education or an equivalent from another state. At present, the two systems are seen as separate forms of higher education, but this has not always been the case in higher education in Belgium. University education has been present in the Low Countries since the establishment of the University of Leuven in 1425. This was the only university until what was later Belgium became part of the Dutch Kingdom in 1815. Under Dutch rule more universities were established. When Belgium became independent in 1830, the status of the old universities changed, with new universities being established during the 19th century and then again in the 1960's.

Non-university higher education in Belgium came into being in the wake of the industrialisation of the country, and several schools for engineering were established in 19th century (Mallinson, 1963). The first teacher training school was established in 1817 under Dutch rule, and once Belgium was independent, more teacher training schools were established in 1834. Training was available for nursery school teachers in 1880 and became compulsory in 1919. Apart from some engineering schools, none of them was seen as providing higher education. This is also true for the schools of social work. The first school of social work was established in 1921, and was seen as a kind of technical secondary school (*Sociale Hogeschool Heverlee*, s.d.: 5). This changed in 1933, when higher technical

the Minister of Education, the Flemish Parliament, and other educational councils (e.g. VLOR, the Flemish Educational Council) on college education, project-based scientific research, and the provision of social services. It also discusses issues with the trade unions and representatives of the student organisations, the VVS) and is responsible for the co-ordination of the external quality assurance among the colleges, sometimes in collaboration with the VLIR (Flemish Interuniversity Council).

education was split into three levels of higher education, one of which was designated as being of “university level”, namely the licentiates trained in commercial colleges. Gradually, a non-university higher education system emerged. In 1952, for instance, social work was upgraded to non-university higher education, but not the education of elementary or nursery school teachers. In 1970, a new law reorganized higher education into two parts: university education and higher education outside the universities, which consisted of “higher education of short duration” (no longer than three years) and “higher education of long duration” (four years or more).² This was the starting point for more structured non-university higher education.

In 1989, Belgium became a federal state, and Flanders could decide its own education policy. This had important consequences. Since then, the policy of the Flemish government has been focused on applying the concepts of quality, autonomy, and deregulation to higher education. Not only among politicians but also among academics, the prevailing opinion was that higher education needed a new approach in which more autonomy should be granted to institutions of higher education. With the University Decree of 1991 and the College Decree of 1994, the Flemish Parliament created a new framework for universities and *hogescholen* (colleges). While the binary system was kept intact and colleges and universities were seen to have their own individual callings, it became clear that it was not easy to make the divide watertight.

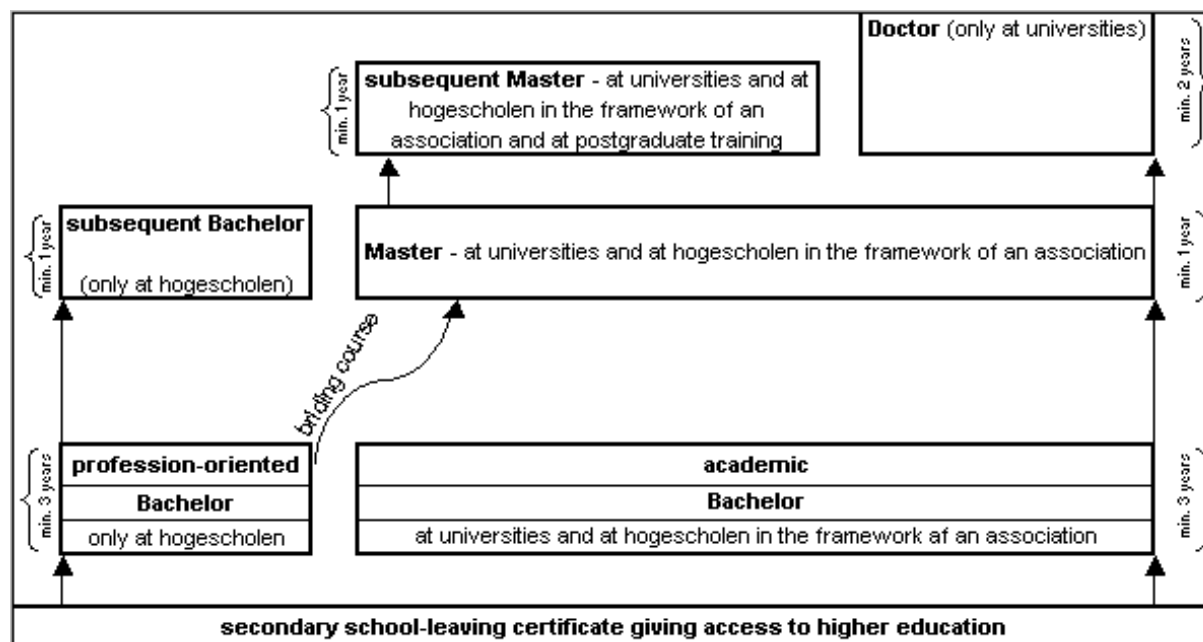
How did the Legislature define the difference between universities and non-university higher education? Article 4 of the Decree of 24 July 1991 states: “Universities should, in the interest of society, be simultaneously active in academic education, scientific research, and the provision of scientific service.” Article 3 of the Decree of 13 July 1994 states: “Colleges should, in the interest of society, be simultaneously active in college education, social service provision, and, where appropriate, project-based scientific research in collaboration with a university or other body in this country or abroad. The development and practice of the arts will also be the task of the colleges, which will organise courses in audio-visual and plastic arts, music and drama. The provision of college education will be the primary task of the college.” Clearly, the Legislature had problems differentiating between universities and

² The Belgian higher education system is thus sometimes called a ternary system instead of a binary system.

colleges but still wanted to stress the difference. This has been changed in a recent decree that was necessary in order to implement the Bologna Process in Flanders.

The “Decree of 4 April 2003 concerning the Restructuring of Higher Education in Flanders” (Structure Decree) is less concerned about distinguishing between university and non-university higher education than about building bridges between them. A kind of duality was created by the Legislature. Although it was stressed in the mission statement (Article 10 of the Decree of 4 April 2003) that both universities and the colleges “are, in the interest of society, active in higher education”, universities and colleges are distinguished. Colleges may participate in the research of universities within the framework of an “association” between a university and one or more colleges (see 1.2), and colleges should also be active in project-based scientific research. Apart from that, the mission statement did not change the original one very much, but it stipulated that universities would train academic bachelors and academic masters, while a college might train profession-oriented and academic bachelors and masters, but the last only within the framework of an association between a college and a university (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The bachelor-master structure in Flanders



Source: VLIR

1.2. Nature of the non-university institutions

Until 1995, non-university higher education in Flanders was present in 163 institutions. In 1992, for instance, the average number of students in a college was 516 but many institutions had fewer (Verhoeven et al., 2002: 1). This fragmentation of equipment and resources for non-university higher education could no longer be accepted if these institutions were to meet the quality standards of the Inspectorate. The Decree of 13 July 1994 established a system of funding for the colleges that put them on the track of merging with other colleges. The target was to arrive at colleges of more than 2,000 students. This aim was not attained immediately. In 1995, 29 new colleges were established as a result of mergers. This process continued over the years to arrive at 22 colleges in 2004. One of the reasons for this ongoing process was the advantageous funding system for larger colleges. At present in 2004, the largest college (*Hogeschool Gent*) has 12,256 students. Most colleges have more than 2,500 students and three have fewer. One of these colleges (the smallest, with 204 students in 2004) is the Antwerp Maritime Academy, which organizes both Dutch and French courses, and is the only college governed by the Flemish government³ and also the only college offering only one field of study. All other colleges are autonomous, even the state colleges, and offer several fields of study.

Before the Decree of 13 July 1994, all the state colleges were directly under the authority of the Minister of Education, but this principle has been abandoned. Each of the colleges is now governed by a board that is responsible for its organisation. The decree imposed only formal requirements (length of the course, division in cycles, ability to abridge the course duration, and so on). The content of the education (the course programme) could be decided by the institutions themselves.

Although all the colleges are autonomous, there are three legal types of colleges. One type is composed of former state colleges, which are now called autonomous colleges. There are five autonomous colleges. The second are the two provincial colleges, and the third type is composed of 14 grant-aided colleges, all of which except for one are run by boards belonging to a Catholic network of colleges. By granting autonomy to the state colleges, the Legislature wanted to disconnect the governing of these colleges from the political fluctuations of the

³ Since Belgium became a federal state in 1989, the Flemish, the French-speaking and the German-speaking Communities became responsible for policy towards culture and personal issues (education, culture, language, welfare and health). The Flemish Community agreed to organize nautical higher education for all of the language communities.

different Ministers of Education, who had previously run them. The structure of the state institutions is still fixed by decree, in contrast with that of the grant-aided institutions, for which only the democratic representation of the students and the staff is regulated by decree (see 2.4).

Besides this basic structure of the colleges, the Decree of 4 April 2003 also established associations, new legal bodies (not-for-profit institutions) in which at least one college and no more than one university share some responsibilities (Art. 101), for example, 1) the offering of a rational supply of courses; 2) the coordination of educational profiles, guidance, transfer opportunities, more particularly between the bachelor and master courses; 3) the organisation of guidance for students; 4) the coordination of personnel policy; 5) the construction of a long-range plan for educational innovation and improvement in close connection with a common quality assurance system; 6) the development of a long-range plan for scientific research and scientific and social service provision in close connection with a common quality assurance system for research; and 7) supervision of the link between research and teaching in the colleges of the association that offer academic education. These associations may become a powerful structure for the organisation of teaching and research in the near future not only in the universities but also in the colleges. Indeed, colleges may not offer academic bachelor and master courses outside an association. Associations in this way became very important instruments for diminishing the distance between the universities and the colleges.

For some colleges, the creation of associations has been seen as the ideal instrument for gaining academic status. Nevertheless, most colleges do not have a research infrastructure or a research tradition equivalent to that of the universities. In spite of this, they believe that the synergy in the association will, in the long run, be a big advantage to them. The universities, for their part, saw in this association policy an opportunity to extend their influence over the colleges and their graduates. Since numbers of students are important for the financial support from the state, and since universities (just like the colleges) increasingly attract most of their students from their surrounding cities, the creation of associations could influence graduates of the association to continue their training in the university of the association. This could make the organizing university more attractive to students from other areas than their immediate vicinity. For some actors in the universities, this consideration was so important that they announced the establishment of an association already in February 2003, two months before the decree had taken on legal force. At present there are five

associations with very unequal numbers of members. One association, namely Association KU Leuven, accounts for more than half the number of the colleges in Flanders (and is spread over Flanders from east to west) and about 44% of the higher education students in Flanders (see Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of associations in Flanders (Belgium) and number of students (2004)

Associatie KU Leuven	Associatie Universiteit-Hogescholen Limburg	Associatie Universiteit Gent	Associatie Universiteit Hogescholen Antwerpen	Universitaire associatie Brussel
KU Leuven + 12 Colleges	Limburgs Universitair Centrum + 2 Colleges	U Gent + 3 Colleges	U Antwerpen + 4 Colleges	VU Brussel + 1 College
Number of students in associations (2004) ⁴				
69,164 or 44.4%	7,808 or 5%	44,423 or 28.4%	23,742 or 15.2%	10,910 or 7%

Source: Onderwijs.Vlaanderen.be (2004a). Author's calculations.

1.3. Access of students and diplomas

One still uncontested principle in Flanders is the democratic accessibility of higher education. Another is the freedom of choice of study, which is related to the principle of free access and to the freedom of education guaranteed by the Constitution. This means that all students with a secondary education diploma have the right to register in the college of their choice. No entrance examinations may be organized although aptitude tests are given for a few particular fields of study. For example, the colleges require that candidates take an aptitude test for their basic courses in nautical science, and entrance examinations are held for some courses in audio-visual and plastic arts, music, and drama.

While registration of students in universities went up from 1984 until 1998 and declined later on, college registrations kept rising. In comparison with 1984-1985, the number of students in 2003-2004 increased by 51%, but in comparison in 1994-1995 by only 15%. In Flanders in 2003-2004, 61% of all registrations in higher education were in colleges. Looking at the figures of freshmen⁵ in colleges there is a slow increase until 2000-2001 (26,766), while later on the numbers diminished somewhat to rise again in 2003-2004 (25,860). The intake of university freshmen is almost stable and reached 12,801 in 2002-2003, but this is only 50% of

⁴ Only the main registrations are counted.

⁵ Students registering for the first time in a college or university.

the number of the college freshmen. Therefore, it could also be expected that in 2000-2001 26.9% of the 21- to 23-year olds in Flanders received a college diploma, and only 18.8% of the 22- to 26-year olds a university diploma (MVG, 2003a: 85). Colleges keep their popularity. In this context, it is also important to mention that only 25.5% of the college students are taking two-cycle courses, the rest takes one-cycle courses.

Table 2. Evolution of the number of students (main registration) in Universities and Colleges in Flanders (1984-2004)⁶

Year	Universities						Colleges					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1984	32421	60.31	21335	39.69	53756	100	33215	47.86	36187	52.14	69402	100
1985	31917	58.93	22242	41.07	54159	100	33884	48.34	36210	51.66	70094	100
1986	31183	57.92	22655	42.08	53838	100	35289	47.20	39470	52.80	74759	100
1987	31014	57.14	23261	42.86	54275	100	36841	47.69	40406	52.31	77247	100
1988	30751	56.21	23961	43.79	54712	100	38104	47.80	41617	52.20	79721	100
1989	30729	55.42	24723	44.58	55452	100	39392	48.15	42415	51.85	81807	100
1990	31125	54.70	25779	45.30	56904	100	39732	48.37	42417	51.63	82149	100
1991	32405	54.43	27133	45.57	59538	100	39001	48.24	41848	51.76	80849	100
1992	32980	53.86	28251	46.14	61231	100	40572	47.81	44286	52.19	84858	100
1993	33431	53.20	29409	46.80	62840	100	43056	47.34	47896	52.66	90952	100
1994	33945	52.60	30585	47.40	64530	100	42386	46.82	48145	53.18	90531	100
1995	34624	51.92	32062	48.08	66686	100	42544	46.63	48687	53.37	91231	100
1996	35050	51.40	33143	48.60	68193	100	43804	46.53	50336	53.47	94140	100
1997	35059	50.70	34094	49.30	69153	100	45779	46.82	52001	53.18	97780	100
1998	34275	49.55	34898	50.45	69173	100	46796	46.83	53137	53.17	99933	100
1999	29982	47.23	33500	52.77	63482	100	46594	46.03	54636	53.97	101230	100
2000	29156	46.22	33925	53.78	63081	100	46711	45.69	55513	54.31	102224	100
2001	29360	45.67	34933	54.33	64293	100	46782	45.70	55577	54.30	102359	100
2002	29760	45.33	35888	54.67	65648	100	47411	45.92	55846	54.08	103257	100
2003	29989	45.17	36402	54.83	66391	100	47270	45.42	56808	54.58	104078	100

Source: Department of Education (Ministry of The Flemish Community)

In order to make entrance possible for most candidates, the enrolment fee is low. The minimum and the maximum fee are fixed by decree: a minimum of €77.48 and a maximum of €449.90 (Onderwijs.Vlaanderen.be, 2004). The minimum fee has to be paid by students who obtain a grant from the government.

⁶ I want to thank Mr. Jef Peeraer (Centre for Sociology of Education) for collecting the figures for this paper, and Mr. Wim De Pelsemaeker, Wim Claeskens and Mrs Ann Bronselaer of the Department of Education (Ministry of the Flemish Community) for providing the most recent figures.

Whether an applicant receives a grant and how much he will receive, depends first of all on the taxable income and the rental value of real estate owned by the parents (or the applicant himself if he is independent). To receive this grant, a student has to pass the examinations each year. If he does not pass or he wants to follow another course than the course in which he started, he is entitled to apply once for a “joker” grant (Decree of 21 April 2004). He may receive this grant once. If the student wants to take a course that is not available in Flemish colleges, he may take this grant to a foreign college or university. In 2003, the maximum grant for a student living outside the home of his parents was €2,286, and living with his family €1,783. The average grant for a one-cycle student in 2001-2002 was €1,311.13 and for a two-cycle student €1,462.07 (MVG, Departement Onderwijs, 2002: 728). In the same year, about 26.42% of the college students received a grant. To give an idea of what this means, we may refer to the average expenditures for parents with a son or daughter in college: the average yearly cost in 2000 was €2,015.20/student for a student who lives at home and €3,621.90/student for one who lives in rented accommodations (Bollens et al., 2000b).

In principle, all colleges may recruit students from all over the country. Though most of them recruit regionally, recruitment also includes foreign students, although there are few of them (see Table 3). Only the Antwerp Maritime Academy has a national function. This college trains maritime officers for the entire country.

Table 3. Main registrations of Belgian and foreign students in colleges from 1999-2000 until 2003-2004⁷ in Flanders

Year	Belgian students		Foreign students		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1999	96703	98.14	1833	1.86	98536	100
2000	97423	98.15	1835	1.85	99258	100
2001	97397	98.05	1942	1.95	99339	100
2002	97413	97.74	2248	2.26	99661	100
2003	97555	97.38	2623	2.62	100178	100

Source: Department of Education (Ministry of the Flemish Community)

One-cycle higher education confers “graduate diplomas” in various disciplines such as midwifery, nursing, social work, export management, accounting, and teaching (pre-school,

⁷ Only basic programmes and the initial teacher programme.

primary, and secondary education - Group 1). The duration of these courses is three years. For academic year 2004-2005, this form of higher education will grant profession-oriented bachelor degrees (see Figure 1). In some fields of study, a subsequent bachelor's degree may be offered after one year of additional study.

Two-cycle higher education confers the following degrees: qualifications as industrial engineer, licentiate, licentiate in nautical science, commercial engineer, architect, and master of arts. The duration of these courses is at least four years. From the academic year 2004-2005 on, this form of higher education grants a bachelor's degree after three years of study and a master's degree after at least one year of further study (see Figure 1). This will give qualifications as master of industrial sciences, master of business administration, master in commercial sciences, master of architecture, master of arts, etc. Master's degree diplomas will be granted within the framework of an association of a university and a college. In some fields of study, a subsequent master's degree may be offered after one year of additional study (Decree of 4 April 2003). PhD degrees may only be granted by a university.

College graduates can continue their education at a university, but they may have to take preparatory courses and examinations at the university. Profession-oriented bachelors, for instance, have to take a bridging course (about 1 year of study) if they wish to register for an academic master's degree at a university or a college. This is not compulsory for a masters who earned his degree at a college and wants to register for a doctoral degree. Nevertheless, the universities are entitled to organize an entrance examination (Art. 66 of the Decree April 2003). Because of the current level of academisation of college education (see 4.2), it is common practice for students to be required to take an examination, which also might mean a bridging course.

The organising body of a college is responsible for the diplomas that are automatically "recognised" by the Flemish Department of Education. Colleges may offer one-cycle higher education and/or two-cycle higher education. Most colleges offer one- and two-cycle higher education. Four offer only one-cycle higher education.

Since the entrance in universities and colleges is open for all students, one could expect that both institutions could attract students with for the most part the same characteristics, but this is not so. Colleges are traditionally associated with profession-oriented

education, whereas universities are focused on an academic education. In 1999, we conducted a survey in which we checked the differences and the similarities between students of human resource management and information science in colleges and universities (Verhoeven et al., 2000; De Wit & Verhoeven, 2003). We concluded that the differences between information science students in colleges and universities were the following: “The survey shows that the students (of colleges and universities) experience and perceive the courses differently. The courses differ regarding educational content and do not prepare for the same functions in the labour market.... They (students) expect to start in similar occupations, but academic-level students also expect to gain in responsibility and move up to leadership functions. One-cycle college students, on the other hand, view themselves as readily employable but without much opportunity to climb the occupational hierarchy.... And, indeed, the different training and vocational profiles attract different types of student. Regarding socio-economic status, we found that the well-known dividing line in higher education ... still exists: colleges and especially one-cycle courses attract a larger share of students from financially weaker families and families with a lower educational level and occupational status. Moreover, while most university students followed general secondary education, for many students in one-cycle college courses the educational career started in technical secondary education and involved entering the college course after having tried university studies.... There is, in brief, a dividing line between academic-level courses and one-cycle courses.” (De Wit & Verhoeven, 2003: 154-155). What we concluded here concerning information science students also held, with some minor differences, for human resource management students (Verhoeven et al., 2000: 290-296).

1.4. Staff recruitment and careers

In 1994, the academic staff of colleges and the corresponding salary scale were composed according to the model of the universities, although a division in three groups was made. Table 4 lists the different functions of each group and ranks them in order of seniority.

Table 4. Types of academic staff in colleges in Flanders (Belgium) (Decree of 13 July 1994)

Group 1	Group 2 (auxiliary staff)	Group 3
-junior practical lector (<i>praktijklector</i>) -senior practical lector (<i>hoofdpraktijklector</i>)	- research assistant (<i>assistent</i>) -doctoral assistant (<i>doctor-</i> <i>assistent</i>)	-junior lecturer (<i>docent</i>) -senior lecturer (<i>hoofddocent</i>) -assistant professor

-junior lector (<i>lector</i>) - senior lector (<i>hoofdlector</i>)	-senior research assistant (<i>werkleider</i>)	(<i>hoogleraar</i>) - professor (<i>gewoon hoogleraar</i>)
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The first group works only in departments with one-cycle courses while the second group only in departments with two-cycle courses. The third group may be assigned to both.

In general, the duties of junior lector, senior lector, junior lecturer, senior lecturer, assistant professor, and professor consist of one of the following tasks or a combination thereof: the provision of education, the carrying out of supporting assignments, the implementation of project-based scientific research, the provision of services to society, and organisational and administrative tasks.

To obtain access to the profession, there are some formal qualification requirements to be fulfilled (Verhoeven & Beuselinck, 1996: 129):

- a junior practical lector or senior practical lector needs a diploma from a one-cycle basic course;
- a junior lector, senior lector, research assistant, or senior research assistant needs a university or a two-cycle course diploma;
- a doctor-assistant, junior lecturer, senior lecturer, assistant professor, or professor needs a doctoral degree.

Seniority combined with useful professional experience is required for promotion to most posts. To become a professor, the conditions are more demanding. Promotion to professor requires the following conditions. First, the college must be actively involved in scientific research in co-operation with a university within the field of the vacancy. Second, the candidate must have been a lecturer, senior lecturer, or assistant professor for six years at a college or university and, during that time, have been responsible for quality research. The competence of candidates within their specific scientific field is judged by a jury or committee of three professors from different universities (Verhoeven & Beuselinck, 1999).

In spite of these principles, the career of college teachers is rather flat (see Table 5). The largest group is composed of lectors and research assistants. This low promotion profile is due to, among other things, the rather low budget of the colleges. Vaes and Posson (2004:

39) state that the combined number of senior practical lecturers and senior lecturers may legally not exceed 20% of the combined number of all Group 1 posts. Nevertheless, the figure is only 2% because colleges cannot afford to pay the rather small salary rise of the promotions. The same could be said of the rather low proportion of senior lecturers, assistant professors, and professors. In 2002, they constituted 11.81% of the staff in Group 2 and Group 3 even though the law permits 25% (Cottenie, 2004: 91). This is a result not only of the lack of money but also of the rather small number of teachers with a PhD in colleges and because a large part (mainly teachers of the large group of one-cycle course students) of the positions does not require a PhD qualification. In 1994, the proportion of teachers in colleges with a PhD was about 11% (Verhoeven & Beuselinck, 1996: 143). This figure can be estimated in 2004 to have risen to 14.25% of the full-time equivalents, which is still low.⁸

Table 5. Teaching staff in Colleges in Flanders by rank and gender in June 2004 in full-time equivalents (N and %).

Rank	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Professor	21.20	0.30	4.00	0.06	25.20	0.36
Assistant Professor	317.44	4.48	51.36	0.72	369.39	5.20
Senior Lecturer	87.30	1.23	25.00	0.35	112.30	1.58
Junior Lecturer	379.37	5.35	123.72	1.75	503.09	7.10
senior lector, senior research assistant, doctor assistant	135.88	1.92	71.96	1.02	207.84	2.94
Lector, research assistant	2328.14	32.85	2257.00	31.84	4585.54	64.69
Senior Practical lector	8.50	0.12	6.00	0.08	14.50	0.20
Junior Practical Lector	464.78	6.56	805.54	11.36	1270.32	17.92
Total	3743.20	52.81	3344.98	47.19	7088.18	100.00

Source: Department of Education (Ministry of the Flemish Community). Our own calculations.

Contractually, members of the teaching staff are employees in the non-state colleges or have a kind of civil servant status in the state colleges. Although this legal status is not totally the same, the consequences are almost the same for both categories. All teachers have to be evaluated at least every five years, with sanctions a possibility for improper professional behaviour.

In 2002-2003, there was one teacher for 11.14 students in the colleges. Most of the teachers are male, but the portion of the female teachers has risen every year and reached 45% of all teachers in 2002-2003 (see Table 6).

⁸ No other data were available for this estimate.

Table 6. Teaching and non-teaching staff in colleges in Flanders by gender from 1994-1995 until 2002-2003⁹ (N and %)

year	Teaching staff						Non-teaching staff					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1994	4877	59.66	3298	40.34	8175	100	207	38.91	325	61.09	532	100
1995	5413	59.88	3627	40.12	9040	100	418	30.58	949	69.42	1367	100
1996	5168	59.11	3575	40.89	8743	100	397	29.98	927	70.02	1324	100
1997	5041	58.64	3555	41.36	8596	100	404	30.10	938	69.90	1342	100
1998	5050	58.09	3644	41.91	8694	100	436	30.66	986	69.34	1422	100
1999	4978	57.13	3735	42.87	8713	100	464	30.97	1034	69.03	1498	100
2000	4954	56.17	3866	43.83	8820	100	495	31.17	1093	68.83	1588	100
2001	4972	55.32	4015	44.68	8987	100	518	31.86	1108	68.14	1626	100
2002	4920	55.00	4025	45.00	8945	100	530	31.81	1136	68.19	1666	100

Source: Department of Education (Ministry of the Flemish Community)

1.5. Funding

Each college receives an “envelope” of funds. For all the colleges together, the Decree of 13 July 1994 specifies the overall amount, which is index-linked to the unit labour costs and consumer prices. Before distribution can be carried out between the colleges, a number of deductions are made to cover certain costs that the government will meet directly, such as the salaries for certain staff members. After these deductions have been made, an overall amount is left for the operational expenses of the colleges. The amount per college is determined on the basis of the following criteria: 1) the historical fixed sum: the costs of the college in the past; 2) the number of students (five-year average); and 3) finance-eligible units: a combination of student numbers (three-year average) and the weightings allocated to the courses according to the nature of the courses. Four groups are distinguished to which the following weightings are allocated: 1.1 for commercial science and business administration, 1.2 for applied linguistics and one-cycle industrial science courses, 1.4 for architecture, biotechnology, social work, and two-cycle industrial science courses, and 1.6 for product development, health care and education. The envelope will be closed until 2006 (Verhoeven & Beuselinck, 1996: 123-124). Nevertheless, the Bologna Process was an important reason for changing some principles and the amount of funding, as we will see later on. In addition to the ordinary funding, colleges can also apply for financial support for investments in buildings, and receive special funding for social services for students. Starting in 2007, the

⁹ For 1994-1995 only data from fulltime-equivalents are at our disposal.

former government also promised to establish new funding principles following the same pattern for universities and colleges.

In 2002, Flanders spent about €7.2 billion on education, or 4.5% of the Flemish Gross Regional Product (MVB, 2003: 701). This last figure has been almost the same for the last ten years, although the Flemish GRP went up almost every year. Over the last ten years, the budget for the colleges absorbed between 7.46% and 8.4% of the education budget (see Table 7). This is a remarkably smaller part than the 9.73% for the universities, which registered only about 57% of the students of the colleges in 2002.

Table 7. Development of the budget of colleges, universities, and for education as a whole from 1991 to 2003 in Flanders (in thousands of Euro, and % of the education budget)¹⁰

Year	Colleges	%	Universities	%	Total budget
1991	342552	7.29	484768	10.31	4701006
1992	372631	7.42	514575	10.24	5023451
1993	398598	7.46	533930	9.99	5343169
1994	423873	7.69	536630	9.73	5513107
1995	438724	7.73	540874	9.53	5673103
1996	465276	7.96	534991	9.15	5845486
1997	472629	7.92	531375	8.91	5967048
1998	478316	7.84	546732	8.96	6104415
1999	503246	7.98	561199	8.90	6306369
2000	550502	8.40	577716	8.81	6554332
2001	557359	8.12	597917	8.71	6863584
2002	575247	7.94	716165	9.89	7244700
2003	592251	7.84	735439	9.73	7556177

Source: Department of Education (Ministry of the Flemish Community)

Since the principles for the budget were established in 1994, this funding schema has been regularly adapted because colleges complained about the shortage of funding. That this made sense was often illustrated by the following: for many years the government paid less for a student in a college than for a student in a secondary school, and this is still the case. The average amount of money spent by the state for a college student in 2003 was €6,139, for a secondary school student €6,901.21, and for a university student €13,592.56 (MVG, 2003: 707).

Does this mean that the colleges had to balance their accounts with a deficit? In 2002, most of the colleges closed the balance positively (Cottenie: 2004: 45). Only one college had

¹⁰ Percentages are calculated as a part of the total budget of education in that year.

a deficit. In spite of these positive figures, Vaes and Posson (2004: 48) complain that the government did not pay enough attention to the increase in the costs of living and the growth of the student numbers between 1996 and 2004. The only reason, they contend, that most of the colleges had such good financial results is the cautious management of the college boards, by not promoting capable teachers or by relying on financial sources other than those of the state. The commissioner of the Flemish government calculated that, between 1998 and 2002, colleges obtained between 16.2% and 19.5% additional financial resources (from fees, the selling of text books, the organisation of seminars for adults,¹¹ etc.) of the total amount granted by the state. These figures might differ greatly from college to college. In 2002, the lowest figure was 13.4%, and the highest 46.5%. Moreover, colleges paid in 2002 55.6% of the investments themselves, 37.4% came from the state, and only 5.2% was obtained from banks (Cottenie, 2004: 84; 51).

Although the financial situation of the colleges does not look so bad, general managers keep repeating that they need more money.¹² This has had its consequences. From 2003 on, the “closed” envelope has been and will be filled by additional financial support from the government. The Decree of 4 April 2003 provides additional funding for the following purposes: 1) to implement the Bologna Process (Art. 148, §2); 2) to promote educational innovation by the use of a plan for educational development and to make the course of study more flexible¹³ (Art. 148,§2); 3) to support the “academisation process” or academic upgrading¹⁴ of the two-cycle courses (Art. 152); and 4) to develop project-based scientific research (Art. 153; Decree of 21 April 2004, Art. 190bis).

2. Institutional governance structure

2.1. The main objectives of the non-university sector

¹¹ Internationalisation and commercialisation have already had influences on colleges.

¹² Before the new Flemish government took office in July 2004, the spokesmen of VLHORA pleaded with the *formateur* for, among other things, €25 million more for the college budget, and demanded that the new finance system would abolish the ‘frozen envelope’ and take into account the number of students (VLHORA, 2004a).

¹³ This might be done by offering different forms of teaching and guidance, distance education, special programmes for working students, etc.

¹⁴ Colleges have to guarantee that academic courses will be based on research and that college teachers will also conduct research.

The College Decree (1994) stipulates the following: “Colleges should, in the interest of society, be simultaneously active in college education, social service provision, and, where appropriate, project-based scientific research in collaboration with a university or other body in this country or abroad. The development and practice of the arts will also be the task of the colleges, which will organize courses in audio-visual and plastic arts, music and drama. The provision of college education will be the primary task of the college.” By stressing college education and teaching, the Legislature followed the traditional division of labour between universities and colleges as it had developed over the last century. Colleges had mainly a vocational character, but at the same time the Legislature admitted that the difference between colleges and universities was not easily made. Moreover, they gave the two-cycle colleges the task of providing education on an “academic level”.

This decision was the result not only of changing opinions among the legislators but also perhaps of the changing social expectations in society. A neo-conservative, neo-liberal ideology, in which utility and efficiency are highly valued, came increasingly to the fore. The demands of the labour market are regarded as having the highest priority (Brown *et al.*, 1997). Education has to serve the national economy and the employment of the members of society. This means for universities that they have to fulfil not only an academic role but also a vocational role. This was not so much the case for colleges, which had always been interested in professional training. Nevertheless, they were looking for the same recognition as the universities had, and the question is whether they can reach this by adhering solely to professional training.

In 1997, we conducted in-depth interviews with 53 university and college teachers of two fields of study, information sciences and human resource management (Verhoeven *et al.*, 2000: 187-188). The data showed that college teachers were not convinced that they should switch to an academic role. They stressed that the first task of a college is to prepare students for immediate availability to the economy but also that they wanted to be recognized and valued for their specific contribution. This was the opinion not only of the teachers. They found among their students this emphasis on practice as well. The interviews of the students confirmed this statement: 72% of the college students in human resource management (N = 276) saw their training as practice-oriented, while only 23% of their university counterparts

(N = 128) did; for students in information sciences, the figures are, respectively, 51% (N = 1,068) and 33% (N= 251) (Verhoeven et al., 2000: 217, 251).

In 2001, we conducted a survey of a representative sample of college teachers (N = 773) and asked about their opinion concerning “academisation” in their college. The average score on a scale of 1 to 5 was 2.5. This means that most of the teachers did not see that the programmes of the college were geared to those of the universities, or that collaboration between a university and their college has emerged, or that the college collaborated much with a university to do research (Verhoeven et al., 2002: 101-102, 107). On the other hand, when asked about any change in behaviour in the college since the merger of the college, they collected an average score of 2.22 out of a possible 3. They saw some moderate change as far as academisation is concerned. Significant is that the average scores do not differ among individual colleges but do differ between teachers of one-cycle and two-cycle fields of study, the latter scoring higher. Moreover, teachers scored only 2.39 out of 1 to 5 on the question of whether the college administration put pressure on them to conduct research.

In spite of the reservations the teachers have toward academisation, the Legislature has definitely chosen to promote the academic trend in two-cycle fields of study. The Decree of April 4, 2003 and the Decree of April 21, 2004, placed the organisation of the curriculum of two-cycle fields of study in the hands of an association of a university with one or more colleges and created a larger basis for scientific research.

2.2. The governing structure of the non-university sector institutions

The governing structure of the state colleges is determined more by law (Decree of July 13 1994) than that of the grant-aided colleges, which received more freedom to set up their governing structures. The provincial colleges also obtained more freedom although they are still subject to provincial law (Verhoeven & Dom, 2002: 38-39).

A **state college** is governed by a board of directors consisting of the representatives of the different categories of the staff elected to 4-year terms by the staff, representatives of the students (elected for 2-year terms by the students), and the representatives of the organizing body and/or the representatives of the socio-economic and cultural sectors (also for 4-year terms). The general manager, the school head of a college, has an advisory voice in this

council (see Figure 2). The board of directors determines the regulations concerning administration, examinations, and discipline, establishes the budget, appoints the staff, establishes the framework for the organisation and co-ordination of the tasks of the educational institution, decides about the entry of the college into an association, and so on. The directorate consists of the chairman of the board of directors, the general manager, and 3 representatives of the staff appointed for 4 years by the board of directors. The directorate is responsible for the everyday administration and the preparation, announcement, and execution of the decisions of the board of directors, the financial management within the framework established by the board of directors, the appointment of non-executive administrative and technical personnel, and many other matters that are not explicitly assigned by law to other administrative organs or posts.

Figure 2. Legal governing structure of colleges according to the legal status of the colleges

State college	Grant-aided college	Provincial college
College level		
Board of Directors	General Assembly and Board of Directors	Provincial council and deputies
General Manager	General Manager	General Manager
Directorate		
	Academic Council	Academic Council
College Negotiation Committee	College Negotiation Committee	College Negotiation Committee
College Council of Students	College Council of Students	College Council of Students
Departmental level		
Departmental Council (for each department)	Departmental Council (for each department)	Departmental Council (for each department)
Head of department	Head of department	Head of department
Department Negotiation Committee	Department Negotiation Committee	Department Negotiation Committee
Department Council of Students	Department Council of Students	Department Council of Students

The general manager is appointed (and may be dismissed) by the Board of Directors and is responsible for the administration of the institute. He directs the administrative and other (e.g. international relations officer) staff. Regularly and at least once a year, he informs the organizing body of the school's financial situation and proposes the budget for the coming year. He is also responsible for the school's material situation, for maintenance and repairs, and for the purchase of furnishings and equipment. He plays a central role in selecting new teachers and other staff members to be appointed by the organizing body. He is responsible

for all external contacts (with the educational support services, the local community, guidance centres, labour market, etc.), and the public relations of the school in general.

The institutes have to organize their own recruitment procedures for the post of general manager. The position may be filled by a member of the regular teaching staff with a permanent appointment, but several colleges have already selected a general manager who did not belong to the teaching staff. The conditions for appointment are similar to those of the teaching staff.

The Decree assigns the **grant-aided colleges** administrative bodies such as an academic council, which has mainly an advisory role with respect to the board of directors (see Figure 2). The board of directors is composed of co-opted members by the general assembly (also composed of co-opted members). This board of directors must inform the academic council about all matters concerning the educational institution. The academic council consists of elected representatives of the board of directors of the college (4 years), of the staff (4 years), and of the students (2 years). This council is entitled to receive information and to advise at least on certain aspects of educational matters, such as the research policy. Third, the academic council has the “competence of consultation” (the taking of decisions on its own initiative or when asked by the board of directors that, when consensus is reached, will be carried out by the board of directors) for at least the educational aspects of certain matters such as the financial policy, the policy concerning education and examinations, and organisation of study guidance. If there is no consensus, the board of directors of the college decides.

Each college must also establish a council of students, consisting of at least 8 elected students (Decree of 19 March 2004). The board of directors and the directorate (only at state colleges) must consult the council of students beforehand on all matters that have direct relevance for the students (e.g. regulations concerning education and examinations and the evaluation of the teaching staff). The council of students may also take advisory initiatives (Decree of 13 July 1994).

Concerning the conditions of employment, each college and each department of an institute has a negotiating committee to regulate the relations between the employer and the unions of the staff (see also 2.5). The negotiating committee of the college consists of the

representatives of the board of directors and of the staff (mainly represented by the unions) of the college.

Within the Bologna process, the Legislature established associations of universities and colleges (see 1.1). These associations are legally organized as non-profit institutions and are freely formed by colleges and universities (Art. 96 – Art. 113 of the Decree of 4 April 2003). Colleges may belong only to one association. The association of a university and a college ends when a college or a university terminates the contract, the notification of which must be given two years in advance by a college and three years in advance by a university. The effect for a college is then that it loses the right to organise the master's degree programmes that had been established within the framework of the association unless it joins another association.

By law, the associations have to establish positions and councils to govern themselves. They have a general assembly, a board of directors, a president, and several steering committees. The universities and the colleges are represented in the general assembly and on the board along with external stakeholders. Representative trade unions and student organizations have a platform where their particular problems can be discussed. In order to perform their tasks, both the colleges and the universities contribute financially to the association. Like the universities and the colleges, the associations have to report every year to the government about their actions and financial accounts, and each association is subject to the supervision of a commissioner of the government, who checks whether all the actions of the association are in accordance with the law.

2.3. Management of the colleges

The management style of colleges in Flanders was certainly influenced by the merger process. This process created considerable problems for the boards, the general managers, and the departments of the new colleges. Old colleges disappeared to become departments in a college. They often had to merge with other colleges that offered the same programmes of study and to become new departments in a new college. Directors of the old colleges lost their positions and were not sure if they could become department heads of the new departments in the new colleges. Departments in the larger colleges did not often share the same physical campus but were spread over several locations in a city, and the campuses of some colleges were even spread out over several cities. In some colleges, the general manager and his staff

have their offices on locations far off the campuses of the college. It was not only a question of finding a way of collaborating between erstwhile competitors, but, certainly in grant-aided colleges, the management of the college had to find a new governing and management structure. Moreover, colleges had to work with a “closed” envelope, establish a quality assurance system, reduce the staff to meet the requirements of the law, establish a new staff system (see 1.4), internationalize the college, merge one-cycle with two-cycle training, etc. One can hardly imagine a bigger challenge for these new colleges, particularly in view of the traditional resistance of higher education to major changes (see Kerr, 1982, van Vught, 1987, Salter & Tapper, 1994, Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999). Therefore, it was no surprise that we found in a survey in 2001 that 45.7% of the teachers were very dissatisfied with the merger, and 23.8% dissatisfied. However, the general managers in 5 case studies were satisfied (Verhoeven et al., 2002: 109).

In 1999, to form an idea of the leadership style of the general manager, we asked all the members of all of the kinds of college councils (N = 808) about the extent to which the general manager involved the teaching staff in the management of the college (Devos et al, 2001: 56, 279- 297). Only 7% of them called the involvement strong, 27% spoke about a moderate involvement, and 66% called the involvement weak. The survey also showed that the involvement was higher in small colleges and in colleges with only a few campuses. The general managers and heads of the departments saw this differently. All the general managers thought that they involved the teaching staff strongly or moderately, and 10% of the heads of the departments spoke of strong involvement by the general manager and 46% of moderate involvement. About four years later, we surveyed teaching staff about their involvement in management decisions of the college (Verhoeven et al., 2002: 115). On an 11-item scale scored from 1 to 5, the average score was 2.68. Thus, the teachers felt only weakly involved in the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that general managers manage the colleges autonomously. They have to pay attention to the recommendations of many councils that have been established by decree or on the initiative of the college. In our 1999 survey, the collaboration between the board and the general manager was relatively highly appreciated (3.68 out of 5), but even a higher appreciation was expressed by all parties involved to the meeting of the general manager and the heads of the departments (3.75 out of 5) and to the

meeting of the heads of the department and the representatives of the courses in the department (3.89 out of 5), the latter being very often similar to the meeting of the old college. Management of a college is a decision-making balancing act between the level of the college and the level of the department. These statements show that the management (Meek, 2003: 12) of the colleges is mainly in the hands of the general manager, the heads of the departments, and their close collaborators (see also 2.4).

2.4. Internal organisation

In Figure 2 we see that each college is divided into several departments.¹⁵ A department is very often an old college or a conglomerate of the old colleges at the time of the merger. Therefore, teachers identify themselves much more with the department than with the college (Verhoeven at al., 2002: 123-125). For each department in a **state college**, there is a departmental council composed of the same parties as the board of directors. This council elects the head of the department, who serves as chairman of the council for a 4-year term. The departmental council is responsible for the establishment of educational programmes and examinations, the establishment of the research programmes, the use of funds and staff, the recruitment of temporary staff, the nomination of staff for permanent appointment, the internal organisation of the department, the drawing up of annual budget proposals, and other matters (Decree of 13 July 1994).

At **grant-aided colleges**, a departmental council has to be established for each department consisting of the head of the department (appointed by the board) as the chairman of the council and elected representatives of the teaching staff, the students, and the socio-economic and cultural sectors. This council has the right of information about all matters concerning the department and may advise on the departmental level when asked by the board of directors of the college or on its own initiative on a range of matters concerning the department (Decree of 13 July 1994).

At state colleges, the departmental negotiation committee consists of representatives of the department council and of the personnel. At grant-aided colleges, it consists of the

¹⁵ Contrary to universities, colleges have no faculties.

representatives of the departmental administration and of the personnel (Decree of 13 July 1994).

All official decisions in a college have to be taken by the board or the general manager. However, the departmental structure could create a decentralized decision-making structure. Relying on the judgment of members of all kind of councils in the colleges, we arrived at the following conclusion: ‘Decentralisation did not occur in all domains of decision-making. *Finance and equipment policy* is seen to be mainly the domain of the college leadership and partly of the department heads. The Departmental Councils play only a minor role in this policy domain.... The *educational policy domain*, however, is different.... Educational policy seems to be the prerogative of the departments. What is interesting here is that the Departmental Councils also play a role, albeit a lesser role than the department heads. *Human-resource policy* is also perceived as decentralised.... However, this decentralisation differs from the decentralisation of educational policy. Human-resource policy is mainly the domain of the department head with the departmental councils playing only a minor role. The colleges have reached a certain level of what P. Hoggett called a “centralised decentralisation” (Henkel 2000: 57), but not to the same extent for all domains of decision making.’ (Verhoeven & Devos, 2002: 159). Nevertheless, this view on decentralisation is not shared by the teaching staff, as we have shown above (see 2.3).

2.5. Participation of external stakeholders in governance and the role of local authorities

Until the 1960’s, it was not customary to have external stakeholders on the board of a college. But the student uproar at the end of the 1960’s and in the beginning of the 1970’s pushed the policymakers to open the boards of the universities to the wider society. The colleges followed this movement, though not at the same pace as did the universities. Nevertheless, the Flemish government in the last ten years has increasingly stressed the importance of openness of institutions of higher education to society. I noted above that the board and the departmental council of a state or grant-maintained college must have representatives of the socio-economic and cultural sectors. In provincial colleges representation of external stakeholders is taken for granted, since the provincial council is the board.

Do they play an important role in governing the college? Case studies indicate that this might differ from college to college. To give a more general picture, we refer to our 1999 survey. In this survey, the council members of the colleges were asked about the importance of the role played by the social and economic stakeholders in the board of directors, in the directorate of the state colleges, in the academic council of the non-state colleges, and in the departmental councils (Devos et al., 2001: 164-182). We asked the members of the different councils to rate the item 'External stakeholders play an important role in the decision making of the Board of Directors' from 1 to 5, the latter being the most positive standpoint. The mean score of the members of the Board was 3.76, which is higher than the responses to a similar item concerning the contribution of the representatives of the personnel on the board (score = 3.45) and of student representatives (mainly in state colleges) (score = 2.65). In the directorate, too, the influence is high (score = 4.77). While the external stakeholders seem to have some influence on the boards, this is less so in the departmental councils (N = 384). Their score here is 3.07, which is lower than those of student representatives (score = 3.16) and of staff representatives (score = 3.85), and the score for the academic councils is even much lower (score = 2.88).

Who are these stakeholders? Although they sit on boards of higher education, not all of them have a higher education degree: 4% have only a secondary school diploma, 44% earned a college degree, and 52% a university degree. Professionally, 13% of them are self-employed, 8% are clerks or officials, 14% are teachers, 45% are executives, and 20% are retired (De Wit & Verhoeven: 2000).

With respect to the role of local authorities, we can be brief. They have no institutionalized influence on the colleges, although the provincial authorities do. In the latter case, the provincial council plays the role of the board (see Figure 2), as described above. Local authorities, of course, may be represented on the board or on a departmental council.

3. Level of autonomy

3.1. The level of autonomy of colleges and universities

In the beginning of the 1990's, the Flemish government wanted a new higher-education law that would make possible a policy based on the principles of deregulation, autonomy, and accountability and that this would be similar for both the universities and the colleges. Although the College Decree of 13 July 1994 strongly resembles the University Decree, there are still differences. This is partly the consequence of the original position of the colleges, which emerged in part from a more state-regulated secondary school system. The colleges received their autonomy. For example, colleges and universities own their buildings, can borrow funds, can spend budgets to achieve their objectives, can design the curricula of the fields of study, which themselves are set by law, can employ and dismiss staff, can decide about the size of the student enrolment, and so on, what E. Ashby calls the "essential ingredients" of institutional autonomy (Meek, 2003: 7). But at the same time, the Legislature has set limits and sometimes provided more freedom to the universities.

In three domains, the colleges received less autonomy than the universities, namely as regards the appointment of staff, the curriculum, and research. First, as far as the staff is concerned, the colleges are bound by rules but are free to hire within these limits. There are many prescriptions about the proportion of the different ranks in the totality of the teaching staff of a college (see also 1.4). For instance since 1994, no more than 64% of the teaching staff could have a permanent appointment and since 2002, no more than 72%. Like the colleges, the universities may appoint no more than 70% of the teaching staff to the ranks of the Independent Academic Personnel (tenure holders), but no proportions for the different ranks are defined by decree. Universities are freer to advance the professional career of their staff.

Second, each college determines independently the curriculum of each course, but they are bound by prescriptions that limit its substantive autonomy (Meek, 2003: 7). One of the prescriptions is that a college may offer only the courses allowed by law, which also applies to the universities. Nevertheless, colleges have less freedom to develop courses than do universities. Courses offered by a college should fit the professional profiles as composed by the VLOR (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*) and the SERV (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*) (Art. 12 of the College Decree). Nevertheless, looking back at the practice, these professional profiles did not acquire the role that could have been expected for them. One of

the reasons is that professional profiles change too rapidly¹⁶ to be used as a point of reference for a curriculum.

Universities could and can organize master's degree courses (within the fields of study determined by the law) autonomously, while in the future academic bachelor's and master's courses in colleges will have to be organized with the university of an association (Art. 32 – 53 of the Decree of 4 April 2003). Nonetheless, in the future, universities also have to bring their training profiles in harmony with those of the colleges belonging to the association (see 1.2).

Third, while universities are free to organize the research they want to do, colleges have to co-operate with universities (in the future in collaboration with the university of the association) for the organisation of project-based scientific research. Moreover, a committee of three university professors is to assess the research work of a candidate for a full professorship at a college. At universities, this is the prerogative of the university.

3.2. The degree of academic freedom

Because colleges emerged from professional schools, most of which were not considered as belonging to higher education until the second part of the 20th century, academic freedom was not a big issue with them. Art. 24 of the Belgian Constitution guarantees the free choice of school and freedom of education, which means that everybody has the right to establish schools. Even under this principle of freedom of education, colleges were subject of inspection by the state inspectorate until 1998. Even in the new College Decree, academic freedom, seen as “ the right (of the faculty) to pursue any line of inquiry in the course of their teaching or research without being censored, penalized or fired by university administrators” (Haskell, 1997) is not mentioned. Indirectly, the Legislature recognizes academic freedom while referring to the right of the Flemish Government (Art. 59 of the College Decree) to organize comparative quality surveys of fields of study in colleges regularly, but by doing this the government should be very careful not to “impair ideological, scientific, educational, and artistic freedom”. On the other hand, the Legislature seems to be more interested in the protection of the rights of the college than in those of the individual

¹⁶ Several visitation reports state that the professional profiles are out-of-date.

researcher. Art. 215bis of the College Decree states that the college becomes the legal owner and has the right of exploitation of the inventions made by researchers of the college. Moreover, the researcher is obliged to inform the responsible office of the college about his invention. Nevertheless, after 12 months, the researcher is free to publish the invention. These regulations, of course, are more important for the sciences than for the humanities.

Nevertheless, the question is whether academic freedom is still seen as it was 50 years ago. A course is no longer a collection of individual courses offered by individual teachers, but it is supposed to be a systematic collection of scientific knowledge, information, practical training, seminars, etc. that fits within an educational profile and prepares students for a particular professional profile. That this picture acquires additional significance can be seen in our 1999 survey: about three quarters of the members of departmental councils were convinced that teachers influence decisions about the curriculum (Devos et al., 2001: 178).

As far as scientific research is concerned, academic freedom was until recently for the majority of the college teachers more of a theoretical right than anything else, since most of them were not involved in research. Smolders et al. (2000: 25, 34, 76, 144, 176) calculated that the average weekly working time of full-time teachers is 46 hours ($SD = 11.07$) of which on average 30 hours are used to prepare lectures, to lecture, and to take care of follow-up activities. On average, teachers teach 14 hours a week. They also stated that about 60% of the college teachers did not conduct any research, and, for most of the other teachers, research did not take more than 20% of their workload. Of those that conducted research, about 70% spent less than one workday a week on research. Out of a sample of 4,043 teachers of the colleges, only 48 were preparing a PhD and 35 were working on a publication. Moreover, the teaching load of teachers with a PhD was no different than the load of those without a PhD, and more than 50% of the teachers who wanted to work on a PhD complained that they did not get to use the time for this provided by law. In the future, this lack of interest in scientific research might change because the law provides special resources for project-oriented research and for the academisation of the education in colleges (Decree of 4 April 2003). Moreover, colleges have to collaborate with universities for offering academic bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

Even though most of the college teachers are not involved in research, some have conducted research. Zwerts and Hollebosch (2000) found 230 research projects conducted by

the colleges in the period of 1998-2000 of which 41.7% were in industrial sciences and technology and 15.7% in commercial sciences and business administration. Most projects were the result of the personal initiative of teachers, and in only a few instances did the interviewees mention a 'research culture' in the college. Most staff members are not sufficiently convinced of the benefits of research for their teaching and also argue for emancipation from the universities (for many research projects, college teachers cannot be the main applicant for grants).

3.3. The relationship between non-university sector institutions and the government

Even though the colleges have a degree of autonomy, links are maintained between the colleges and the government. First, there is the contact between the VLHORA, the government, and the Department of Education. On the Board of this Council, the Minister of Education is represented by one of his staff, and this is also the case for AHOWO (Administration of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Department of Education of the Ministry of the Flemish Community). This forum is an important informant for policymakers about the aspirations of the colleges.

Second, the contact between the government and the colleges is also organized on the basis of regular reports sent to the Department of Education, some of them with the risk of a financial sanction if is not delivered before a particular date (Art. 234 of the Decree of 13 July 1994). For instance, each college has to publish an annual report and annual accounts according to the prescriptions of the law. This annual report is public and is sent to the Flemish Parliament. Among other things, it reviews the college's education and project-based research activities, investments in buildings, social services for students, internationalisation, the results of the visitations (since 2002) within the external quality assurance system, and the actions taken to correct the defects. In short, it reports on everything the colleges are required to do by law. Moreover, every year each college has to submit a one-year and a five-year budget and a report on the staffing of the college to the Flemish government for approval. This has to be done in compliance with legal regulations.

Third, colleges are also monitored by a commissioner of the Flemish government (*Commissaris van de Vlaamse Regering*). Three commissioners and one commissioner co-ordinator monitor all colleges. These commissioners have to make sure the colleges comply

with the law as regards financial management (e.g. are the receipts and expenses of the college according to the law?) and whether the budget of the college is balanced. They also check whether the accounts and the financial reports are in conformity with the law and general accounting practices. The commissioners publish an annual report for the government concerning the situation of the colleges.

The “*Vlaams Onderhandelingscomité voor het Hoger Onderwijs*” (Flemish Negotiating Committee for Higher Education) was established for when negotiations are required between the Minister of Education, the unions, and boards of the colleges about the programming of measures concerning the regulation of the legal position of the staff (Decree of March 19, 2004).

3.4. Regulation mechanisms of the government

Contrary to the general principle of deregulation of higher education policy proclaimed by the different governments over the last decade, the same governments have ruled by law and finances. On the one hand, the government granted freedom to the colleges to organize education and research themselves according to the principles determined by the college, but, on the other hand, the government wanted colleges to merge, to be governed according to the law, to offer quality education, and to maintain a healthy financial balance. It also wanted to keep control of the supply of fields of education in colleges. In order to attain these objectives, many regulations were created by decree. Here are some examples.

1) In order to motivate the colleges to merge, better financial conditions were offered to the colleges that did so. In a period of less than ten years, 163 colleges merged to 22.

2) The College Decree created a staff and salary structure similar to that of the universities. The college boards are not yet permitted to appoint freely but have to follow rules determining the proportion of staff that can be appointed in a particular rank.

Every year the application of these principles are monitored by the government commissioners, who report to the government. In 2002, all colleges complied with these rules (Cottenie, 2004: 90-100).

3) Quality assurance is no longer the responsibility of a government inspectorate. The colleges are individually responsible for their own internal and external quality assurance system. External quality assurance is organized within the framework of the VLHORA. For two-cycle courses in the future, the VLHORA will collaborate with the VLIR, and the VLHORA and the VLIR together have prepared a quality assurance protocol (Vlaamse Hogescholenraad, 2004). The colleges are legally obliged to report every year about the results of the quality assurance process.

4) Direct supervision of the application of the legal principles by the colleges is provided by the commissioners of the Flemish government. Sanctions may follow if rules are broken (see also 3.3).

5) Starting in the academic year 2004-2005, the colleges will not have the right to offer courses that are not included in the National Register of Higher Education (Decree of 4 April, 2003). Apart from some exceptions, new bachelor courses may only be offered in 2006-2007. Decisions about the content of this register are taken by the government on the advice of the *Erkenningscommissie* (Recognition Commission),¹⁷ which then assigns particular courses to particular colleges. The register will be maintained by the independent *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie* (NVAO) (Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) in The Hague in the Netherlands. In the future, only accredited courses will be supported by state subsidies.

The general principles of far-reaching autonomy and deregulation that were identified in the government's policy purposes have not always been realised in practice, as is shown by these examples.¹⁸ This policy has not been changed by the establishment of the associations in 2003. Although colleges could independently choose a university with which to associate, associations have also to follow the funding prescriptions, a prescribed bookkeeping system, etc. and to work under the supervision of a commissioner of the Flemish government. This description does not fit the model of deregulated government by B.G. Peters and has some characteristics of participative government (see 3.3) with consultation and negotiation between the government and the colleges (Maassen, 2003:40-41).

¹⁷ National and international experts are composing this committee and have to assess whether a course fits principles of efficiency in the total higher education supply: the relation of the course with the existing supply, the number of students in the same or related courses, the expected demand for graduates in this or related courses, the social relevance of the course (Art. 62, §3 of Decree of April 4, 2003).

¹⁸ VLHORA recently advised the new government to stop the 'trend of overregulation' (VLHORA, 2004b).

4. Future Trends

4.1. Future developments of the colleges and their relation to universities

It would not be correct to say that the innovations in higher education in Flanders are only the result of the Bologna Process, but the Bologna Process has obviously created more opportunities for change. There has not been much opposition against the Bologna Process in Flanders neither among politicians nor among university or college teachers and students. The main consequence of the Bologna Process was that all courses would be adapted to the bachelor-master schema (Decree of 4 April 2003). Although planning this process was an immense task, all the colleges and universities adopted the bachelor-master system in September 2004. The European option to mould the system of higher education into the same pattern everywhere has been put on track. But this is not enough for the internationalisation of higher education. Internationalisation of higher education also needs 1) new rules for the use of the teaching language, 2) a clear study route, 3) a guarantee that quality education is provided, and 4) the acceptance of competences and qualifications acquired elsewhere.

First, for the colleges, this meant that the laws concerning the use of Dutch as a teaching language had to be adapted. Under certain conditions, colleges are allowed to offer courses or parts of courses in a foreign language in order to attract foreign students (Art. 90 and 91 of Decree of April 2003). However, the internationalisation of college education cannot be promoted only by creating more language facilities.

Second, foreign (and national) students need a transparent study route and, third, a guarantee that the education provided is of good quality. The Decree of 30 April 2004 will make the study route of students more flexible. This means that students no longer have to take examinations every year of all the parts of a course programme in order to go on to a next year. From 2005 on, it will be possible for students to collect credits for parts of a course programme, which will be combined to fulfil the requirements for obtaining a diploma. These credits will not have to be earned in specific academic years but may be collected over several years. This was not possible until 2004. In this way, the Legislature wants to create a higher education system where everybody can follow a study route at his or her own pace thereby creating the possibility of combining work and study and opening the system to foreigners

where the study route might differ. Fourth, the government has also given attention to ‘transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition’ of competences and/or qualifications acquired elsewhere (outside of higher education or in another country), as stated in the Copenhagen Declaration of the EU (Council of the European Union, 2002). Special committees are to be established in colleges to apply these principles and excuse students from parts of the course for which they have shown that they have attained qualifications or competences by study or work. Moreover, colleges will have the right to make agreements with foreign institutions to offer students a diploma granted by those institutions. All these new rules will be applied in the coming years. Only the future will show to what extent these new measures will open colleges more than before to foreign students and create another road to higher education thus moving toward life-long learning. These measures are for colleges and universities alike, and it is not clear yet who will gain the most. Because student numbers are so important for the funding of colleges and universities and because the number of students in the universities has been declining since 1999-2000 while the number of students is still rising, albeit very slowly, in the colleges, it is clear that both expect these new regulations to help them to find new clients.

Internationalisation might open new sources for clients, but it might also open routes for leaving the national higher education system. Students can choose an education abroad for several reasons. For instance, it could be because of the higher quality of the training abroad or because a foreign college offers a programme not available in Flanders. Colleges and universities alike have to offer education that is comparable in quality to that which can be obtained abroad. In order to guarantee this quality, the government has, in co-operation with the Dutch government, established the international, independent *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie* (NVAO) (Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation).¹⁹ All the courses of colleges and universities have to be accredited in the near future. This measure should also protect students against low quality higher education institutions, both foreign and national.

At the same time that the internationalisation process of higher education was being promoted within the Bologna Process, the colleges saw a way to bring courses that were

¹⁹ The NVAO has made an agreement with 12 other accreditation organisations within the framework of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) to come to a mutual recognition of accreditation decisions starting in 2007.

defined as “academic” closer to the universities. The colleges did not become universities, but since 2004 have been united in associations with universities (see also 1. 1 and 1.2). Although universities are supposed to have the lead in academic education, colleges also play an important role in some parts of academic education. While the universities offer academic education to about 56,000 students, two-cycle academic courses in colleges have about 26,000 students. Academic bachelor and master programmes can no longer be organized by a college independently but have to be done within the framework of an association. Although some universities and colleges were eager to start an association, it will be a tremendous challenge for these associations to fulfil their purposes. To mention just a few of them: How can universities and colleges agree on a rational supply of courses when both offer courses with very similar targets? How can one co-ordinate staffing policy when the opportunities for promotion are different in colleges and universities? How can a research policy for university and colleges be devised when the college does not have a research culture? (see also 1.2 and 3.2). Should the number of courses in some fields of study be reduced in order to provide the best teachers and the necessary research equipment in some colleges (rationalisation)? Will universities and colleges be partners or competitors in the association? In the future, these and other questions will have to be resolved to make the association a viable organisation.

4.2. Academic drift

Above (see 2.1), it was stated that the college teachers and students were not filled with enthusiasm the academic drift. Both the teachers and the students favour more a vocational emphasis. Moreover, several surveys have shown that most of the teachers do not feel that the college curriculum is focused on the university curriculum or that teachers are eager to collaborate with universities on research. The number of college teachers working on a scholarly paper is extremely low, and 50% of the teaching assistants working for a PhD complain that they did not get the time to work on it (see 3.2).

This does not mean that research is totally lacking in the colleges. Some fields of study (for instance, commercial sciences and business administration, industrial sciences and technology) are more active in research than others. They also receive more financial support. In comparison with those of the universities, the research resources of the colleges are very small. From the college decree, one could easily gain the impression that the basic calling of the colleges is to provide college education: research does not belong to the core business of

the colleges even though it is mentioned in the law. This also has consequences for the recruitment of personnel: the proportion of teachers with a PhD is still low. This is not unreasonable because one-cycle higher education delivers BA diplomas that are not meant to prepare for a master's degree. Consequently, the proportion of staff members in professorial ranks is very small.

Moreover, the college teachers have a much higher teaching load than do the university teachers, which means less time for research. Moreover, the weekly teaching load of the college teachers with a PhD, who are the people who are the best prepared to conduct research, is not less than the teaching load of the teachers without a PhD degree.

Taking all this into consideration and knowing that the colleges have a staff of which 60% is more than 45 years old, we can well expect that it would be hard to get the college teachers to go along with academic drift as the vocational orientation has always been the standard attitude in the colleges.

In spite of all this, the Legislature wants to promote this academic drift among the staff of the two-cycle colleges. By creating the associations, the Legislature, while explicitly assigning participation in scientific research to the colleges (Art. 10 of the Decree of April 4, 2003), did not take for granted that college representatives in the meetings of the association would be inspired to support academic drift just by sitting together with the representatives of the universities. Thus, Art. 152 of the Decree of April 4, 2003, provides funding²⁰ for two-cycle programmes that invest in "academisation", and other research resources are being made available for the colleges.

What does the Legislature mean by academisation? The colleges have to provide:

- 1) detailed planning until 2006 to guarantee that all academic courses offered by the association are based on scientific research;
- 2) assurance that the teaching staff of the colleges will be engaged in scientific research;
- 3) a system of evaluation of this process, and
- 4) a report on the spending of this special funding.

By law, they have until 2012-2013 to reach this goal (Art. 124, §9 of the Decree of 4 April 2003). At that time, accreditation will depend on the extent to which the two-cycle colleges have attained the objectives of academisation.

²⁰ In 2003 €5 million was provided, in 2004 €8 million, in 2005 €10.9 million and in 2006 €12.9 million. These are small amounts since they have to be distributed among 22 colleges.

This is not an easy task for an organisation in which the research culture is weak, so the structure of the association can be an advantage. University and college staff will have to meet with each other and plan together. The rather short life of the associations offers no evidence as yet that this be easily done, and it is not clear that all involved in this process are fond of this innovation. For example, the rector of one university complained in September 2004 on the occasion of the opening of the academic year that associations were too heavy a burden for the universities because they do not have enough resources to do their own work.

There is no doubt that the colleges will need to change if they are to achieve this ideal of academisation. It is also clear that these goals will not be attained if the staffs of the two-cycle colleges do not acquire a research-oriented habitus, and this habitus cannot survive if there is no room for change. Among other things, the following changes might help this innovation: the teaching load of the teachers has to be reduced, which means an increase of the budget in order to create more room to do more research and teach less; interest in research has to be promoted among the staff; the recruitment of teachers interested in research must increase, and more PhDs be hired; teachers who become involved in research have to have a realistic view of their chances for promotion, which means that promotion should not be frozen for financial reasons; and the colleges need an expanded research infrastructure. Not only do changes have to be made in the colleges to meet these new requirements, but structural changes of the financial and science policy will also be necessary. VLHORA (2004b: 3), the organization of the Flemish colleges, is aware of this and is demanding a fair share of the research money, which is at present monopolized by the universities, and for a larger part of the Flemish education budget.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that political changes in Flanders have contributed to a rapprochement between the universities and the colleges, but this has not led to an abandonment of the binary system. The federalization of Belgium in 1989 gave Flanders an opportunity to make its own important decisions concerning higher education policy. The new law was passed for the universities (1991) and a little later also the one for the colleges (1994). This was the first step in diminishing the distance between the colleges and the universities. Important for the colleges was that the college decree applied many of the principles of the university decree,

although the Legislature still specified that colleges had a different calling than did the universities. For instance, the position and the ranking of the teaching staff, the salaries, and the administrative organization of the colleges are now very similar in the colleges and the universities. Moreover, the college decree required that the colleges merge in order to create larger, more viable units. Although this merger process did not proceed without problems, in the long run the colleges did take advantage of it. Just like the universities (VLIR), they created a council of the college general managers (VLHORA), which was recognized by decree, in order to defend their interests. Nevertheless, some differences were retained, one being that the state financial support of the colleges is much less than that for the universities.

The second important political event for the rapprochement between the colleges and the universities was the Bologna process. This is a good example of how national higher education policy might be determined by international events. Once the political decision makers had determined to join the Bologna process, a decision in Flanders that was certainly also influenced by the universities and the colleges, a new opportunity was created to bring the universities and the colleges closer to each other. One of the challenges was the academisation of college education, so a new law created the structures necessary for this process. Where the colleges and the universities until recently lived separate lives, the Decree of 4 April 2004 created an institution, namely the association, in which they are compelled to cooperate in many areas. These associations bring the members of two kinds of institutions together to work for the academisation of the master's education in the colleges. A new bridge between the two poles is being built. The question will be whether the two parties are eager sufficiently and have enough resources to use that bridge to each other's advantage. We have shown above that not everything that is needed is present, but the first steps have been taken.

Bridging the universities and the colleges by means of the associations in order to improve the academisation process in the colleges is unobjectionable. However, the society also needs trained, professionally oriented people. This has been the main task of the colleges ever since they were established, and most college teachers are of the opinion that the colleges should first of all prepare students for the labour market. The vocational orientation has not disappeared – quite the contrary. We can only wonder how long it will take before the structural integration of the universities and the colleges will have an effect on everyday life

in the colleges. Will the universities become more like the colleges or will the colleges become more like the universities? At present, no one can say with certainty.

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