

PRESS RELEASE

July 2018

Report to the Flemish Parliament

Integration of Academic Higher Education College Training in Universities

The Court of Audit investigated whether integration of higher education (HE) college training programmes into universities has led to expected changes on an academic level. It concluded this seems to be the case, but the integration process has not yet been completed. The number of researchers in the staff responsible for the integrated programmes remains limited and the number of research projects and contracts has not really increased. Universities do not systematically monitor integration effects. The Court also paid attention to fine arts HE colleges and practice-oriented scientific research in HE colleges. Arts colleges rarely succeed in attracting research projects and their cooperation with universities can be improved. Finally, the Court of Audit noticed that not all financial resources intended for scientific research do actually fully reach HE colleges.

Academization

Academic HE college courses were integrated into universities from the 2013-2014 academic year onwards, with a few exceptions, amongst which academic arts courses. Within universities, these constituted independent administrative entities, the so-called Schools of Arts. The Court of Audit investigated whether the integration led to sufficient academization - that is, whether education was sufficiently embedded in scientific research. The Court focused its audit on three areas of study: architecture, industrial sciences and technology, and commercial sciences and business administration or public administration.

Resources

There are some guarantees that universities use additional academization research resources for the integrated courses only. Universities receive smaller operating budgets for some of the integrated programs than HE colleges used to, but they nevertheless guarantee integrated programs the same operating budgets as before or take compensatory measures. Universities also provide temporarily shielded research resources for integrated programs. However, these programs have only limited success in acquiring competitively allocated funds for fundamental research.

Evaluation

Given the relatively short timeframe, integration has already led to a favourable development of research and further academization. However, the academization process is not yet complete. The number of researchers in total staff is still limited. More research led to publication already, but the financial means for research projects and research agreements do not show an increasing trend. The number of current doctorates is also gradually

increasing in all universities and areas of study. In general, universities do not sufficiently follow up those specific academization indicators.

Retention of own professional orientation

The Court also assessed whether integrated HE training courses retained their own professional orientation, as was stated. The answer to that question was yes. The degree to which the professional field of integrated programs differs from that of related academic programs depends on the field of study.

Schools of Arts

The Schools of Arts gained autonomy within the HE colleges. The number of doctorates awarded in the arts has not yet increased. Its financing does not favour the Schools of Arts. Research in the arts relies almost exclusively on government funding and the Schools of Arts only occasionally succeed in winning competitively assigned research projects. Incidentally, there is no regulatory system to measure the output of research in the arts and to finance this research based on that. Finally, contacts between independent academic university staffs and staffs of the Schools of Arts can be strengthened.

Practice-oriented scientific research

Following transfer of the academic programs, HE colleges had to be able to further develop practice-oriented scientific research (POSR). They managed in doing so partly thanks to the fact that POSR benefits increased by more than 40%, which largely compensated for the decline in income from research contracts. The TETRA fund, another option for government financing, only reaches HE colleges to a limited extent. Universities and HE colleges do not generally work together trying to compete for TETRA projects. The initiatives of the associations to stimulate cooperation between universities and HE colleges do not seem to meet the expectations of the HE colleges.

Response of the minister

The minister argued that, given the short time perspective of the audit, it is still too early to draw conclusions and take measures. According to the minister, the external follow-up of the integration can take sufficiently place within the quality assurance system and its reviews of schools. According to her, it is up to the institutions and the associations themselves to make adjustments if problems are met.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The audit report on *Integration of Academic Higher Education College Training in Universities* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full version and this press release can be found on the Court's website: www.courtofaudit.be.