

How to increase participation rates in part-time higher education?

An ex-ante evaluation of four scenario's proposed by the Dutch government.



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Abstract

Between 2001 and 2011, participation rates in part-time programmes of public higher education institutions have reduced by half in the Netherlands. An effective policy is needed to avoid harm to the knowledge economy. The Dutch government has proposed four scenario's with the aim to increase participation rates in accredited part-time higher education. However, information is missing on the successfulness of each scenario. This study tries to fill this gap in knowledge by answering the following research question: How successful will each of the four scenarios, proposed by the Dutch government, be in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education? An ex-ante evaluation will be conducted in order to determine which scenario will be the most successful in increasing participation rates. The four scenarios will be assessed on their ability to decrease barriers that inhibit adults from taking part in part-time higher education. To conclude, the enforcement of Demand-driven-funding in part-time higher education is be presented as expected to be the most successful in increasing participation rates.

Keywords

Part-time higher education, Barriers to participation, Continuing education, Knowledge economy, Educational attainment, Demand-driven funding, Privatization, the Netherlands.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1	
1.1 The importance of part-time higher education for the Netherlands.....	6
1.1.1 Extending the working life.....	6
1.1.2 Creating an adaptive workforce	7
1.1.3 Meeting the demand of the labour market	8
Chapter 2	
2.1 The developments towards four potential scenarios for part-time higher education	8
2.2 Debate on the success of the four scenarios in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education	11
Chapter 3	
3.1 Research methodology.....	12
3.2 Analytical framework on barriers to participation in part-time higher education	133
3.2.1 Situational barriers	144
3.2.2 Institutional barriers.....	15
3.2.3 Dispositional Barriers	19
3.3 Remarks on the barriers to participation	20
Chapter 4	
4.1 Ex-ante evaluation of the Four Scenarios proposed for part-time higher education	233
4.1.1 Scenario 1: Making amendments in current legislation.....	233
4.1.2 Scenario 2: Enforcing specific legislation for part-time higher education	266
4.1.3 Scenario 3: Privatisation of part-time higher education	288
4.1.4 Scenario 4: Enforcement of demand-driven funding.....	30
Chapter 5	
5.1 Discussion of the results.....	32
5.2 Conclusion	355
Reference list.....	377

Introduction

Part-time higher education is in an apparent state of emergency in the Netherlands. Between 2001 and 2011, participation rates in part-time programmes of public higher education institutions have reduced by half (ResearchNed, 2012). The main functions of part-time higher education are to update the skills of the work force and give adults the opportunity to obtain a higher education degree later in life. Consequently, part-time higher education is important for a fast-changing global knowledge economy, as it creates an adaptable workforce. The Dutch government aspires to be among the five most competitive knowledge economies in the world (Coalition agreement, 2012). However, the enormous decline in participation in part-time higher education does not align with the ambitions of the government. With an aging population resulting in an increased demand for higher level skills, the government feels even more pressure to take action regarding part-time higher education. It is clear that a paradigm shift in part-time higher education is crucial. Based on several studies commissioned by the government, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science came up with a proposal to increase participation rates in part-time higher education goal on March 30, 2012 (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015: 30012.41). The proposal includes four possible scenarios for the future of part-time higher education in the Netherlands. The goal of each scenario is to increase participation rates in accredited part-time higher education programmes. The following scenarios have been proposed:

- Scenario 1: Making amendments in current legislation
- Scenario 2: Enforcing specific legislation for part-time higher education
- Scenario 3: Privatisation of part-time higher education
- Scenario 4: Enforcement of 'Demand-driven funding'

The four scenarios have caused commotion as stakeholders are worried about the effectiveness of each scenario. People are uncertain about the ability of each scenario to increase participation rates in accredited part-time higher education programmes. The inability of knowing the effects of each scenario has also been ascertained by the government itself. Therefore, the government decided to implement two pilots which consist of different elements from each of the four scenarios proposed above (Tweede Kamer 2014-2015, 30012.41). However, the results will take time to establish since the pilots will last five years. Moreover, the set-up of the pilots has been criticised based on its reliability (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015, 30012.51). There is clearly a gap in knowledge of whether the four scenarios will be successful in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education. The research question for this study is as follows:

How successful will each of the four scenarios, proposed by the Dutch government, be in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education?

An ex-ante evaluation will be conducted in order to determine which scenario will be the most successful in increasing participation rates. The four scenarios will be assessed on their ability to decrease barriers that inhibit adults from taking part in part-time higher education.

The first chapter of this study will elaborate on the importance of part-time higher education for the Netherlands. The basic functions of part-time higher education will be stressed, as well as the role of higher education in addressing societal challenges. The second chapter will touch upon a number of studies that have provided useful information about part-time higher education and lifelong learning in the Netherlands. Building on the knowledge gained from these studies, the government formulated four scenarios, which will be reviewed. Attention will be called to the inclusive debate about the success of each scenario in increasing part-time higher education rates. In the third Chapter, the barriers to participation in part-time higher education will be identified based on a

literature review. These barriers will be converted to an analytical framework used to evaluate each scenario. In the next chapter, this framework will be used to evaluate which barriers to participation are addressed in each of the four scenarios. The research question will be answered in the last chapter of this study.

Chapter 1

1.1 The importance of part-time higher education for the Netherlands

In this chapter, the importance of taking action to increase the participation rates in part-time higher education will be underlined. First, the general basic function of lifelong learning, as described by the Educational Council (2009), will be mentioned. This basic function will illustrate the purpose of part-time higher education as it plays a significant role in lifelong learning. Afterward, the focus will be on the role of part-time higher education in coping with societal challenges in the Netherlands. The goal of this chapter will be to illustrate the important contribution of part-time higher education in the context of society challenges.

As a supporter of lifelong learning, the Education Council (2009) promoted the four basic functions of adult higher education. The first function is called repair, which means that people who missed out on education earlier in life have second chances to obtain degree-level qualifications. This was a traditional approach to lifelong learning when it was introduced in the 1970s (Harvey, 2010).

However, recent approaches go beyond a single focus on second chance education. Nowadays, adult education is seen as a path to career changes as well. Re-skilling and upskilling will help adults to gain the pre-requisites for jobs they favour or jobs more suitable for their ages. Another function of adult education is keeping skills up to date. In a quickly changing globalized world, knowledge becomes outdated easily, which makes it important for adults to keep their competences and knowledge updated. The last function of adult education, described by the Educational Council (2009), is social-cultural and personal development. When individuals gain high education qualifications, their overall health and life expectancies tend to improve. Also, they tend to engage more in civic activities in terms of voting, volunteering, and political interest. Moreover, adults who have attained higher levels of education are generally more satisfied in life than those with lower levels of educational attainment, which tend to contain violence (OECD, 2013).

The four basic functions of adult higher education provide opportunities to deal with societal challenges. For example, the study of de Boer et al. (2013) described the need to expand continuing higher education as a consequence of demographic changes as western societies rapidly age. Also, high levels of unemployment and the demand for higher education attainment levels are linked to the need for continued learning. Roughly coinciding with these three factors is the crucial role of part-time higher education in overcoming challenges in the Netherlands, which is discussed below.

1.1.1 Extending the working life

Part-time higher education is crucial to extending the working life of older workers and making optimal use of their human capital. The Netherlands is facing an extensive shrinking and aging of its population in the coming years (OECD, 2013). The demographic change results in a diminishing workforce, which puts pressure on the welfare system. In order to increase the labour force participation, the Dutch government plans to increase the retirement age to 66 in 2018 and to 67 by 2021 (Rijksoverheid, 2015). However, the expected increase in participation will not fully compensate

for the expected decline of the workforce (OECD, 2013). Since the workforce is no longer expanding, it has become more important to increase the employment rates of older workers and to improve their productivity (Keller, 2001).

First, an increase in labour participation and prolonged working life of older workers is crucial. In the Netherlands, the employment rate for the 55-64 age group was 60,1% in 2013. Although the rate is above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area average of 54,9%, it remains well behind the best achievers. Also, the mobility among older workers is extremely low (OECD, 2014). The OECD (2006) has reviewed the aging and employment policies and deemed policy action is required in the field of lifelong learning to improve the employability of older workers. Part-time higher education could help older workers stay employed because there is a strong relationship between education qualifications and employment (Fouarge & Schils, 2008; Picchio & Ours 2011).

Second, the national economy cannot rely only on the young highly educated, “but also need the older generations with up-to-date skills and knowledge” (de Boer et al., 2013, p.9). Problematic situations occur when technological change alters the job task in such a way that the value of an older worker’s knowledge drops considerably. Advanced technology and competition of highly educated migrants tend to lead to declining opportunities for older workers. The CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (2013) observed that these trends not only affect the oldest group of workers, between 60-64, but also the older prime-aged workers (40-59). These workers could update their knowledge and skills by attending part-time higher education programmes, which would make them less vulnerable to threats of offshoring and might qualify them for different career paths more suitable for seniors, thus avoiding possible early retirement. However, Karmel and Woods (2004) stated that increasing education levels will only partially counterbalance the impact of an aging workforce.

1.1.2 Creating an adaptive workforce

Part-time higher education is vital to the future of economic success because it is an opportunity to create an adaptive workforce. In the coalition agreement (2012), the Dutch government expressed its ambition to ensure a position in the top five most competitive knowledge economies. Due to increased globalisation and technology improvements, the economy has to be dynamic in order to stay competitive. A workforce, adapting constantly to changing opportunities and labour market demands is considered necessary in a continuously changing economic environment (The World Bank, 2003). Also, (OECD, 2011) highlighted the importance of a working population able to anticipate change in economic and social innovations. The speed of change in society has become a significant driver of the need for continual learning since knowledge is quickly outdated. Technology, in particular, advances quickly, which requires skills to be updated on a regular basis. Skills upgrading is important since the majority of future demand for new skills has to be met by the current workforce. Therefore, upskilling and re-skilling of the existing workforce must be at the heart of educational policies (OECD, 2011). Part-time higher education has the potential to play a significant role in updating and improving the skill levels of people already employed. Moreover, part-time education could help to fill skill gaps by focusing on employability skills widely sought by employers (UCES, 2011).

1.1.3 Meeting the demand of the labour market

Part-time higher education could increase attainment levels of workers as demanded by the labour market. The Dutch economic future depends on continuing investment in and development of its skills base. The knowledge intensity of jobs will increase, leading to an expanding demand for highly skilled workers. Cedefop's (2013) research report indicated an increased demand of highly skilled workers in the Netherlands. The need for highly educated workers is expected to grow by 30% between 2010 and 2020. This trend corresponds to a prediction made by the OECD (1996): "employment in the knowledge-based economy is characterized by increasing demand for more highly skilled workers" (p. 7). Also, Yard (2014) noticed an increase of 15% of vacancies asking for highly skilled people in the third quarter of 2014 compared to a year before. The qualifications profiles, demanded of workers, are thus shifting toward higher levels. Consequently, the supply of highly skilled workers needs to increase to prevent imbalances likely to lead to long-term and permanent joblessness. Part-time higher education could play a prominent role in meeting the high-level skills by raising the educational attainment of the workforce.

Thus, in the context of increased global competition, advancing technology, an aging population, and high unemployment, ensuring an adequate supply of skills is crucial. Optimizing skills of the current workforce to meet the demand of the labour market is seen as the key to boost economic growth, and part-time education is believed to be the tool to achieve this goal (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015 30012.4).

Chapter 2

2.1 The developments towards four potential scenarios for part-time higher education

Although part-time higher education is valuable to Dutch society, participation rates are too low. The dramatic decline in student numbers indicates the unattractiveness of part-time studies. There appear to be some barriers for those wishing to pursue higher education part-time. The question is which barriers to participation the potential part-time learners face. This chapter will summarize government-funded research on the barriers to part-time higher education, and lifelong learning in general, in the Netherlands. The Dutch government commissioned the majority of these research studies in order to determine shortcomings of part-time higher education. The four scenarios proposed are drawn from the evidence and advice given in these studies. Additionally, the discussion about the success of the scenarios in increasing participation in part-time higher education will be addressed.

The Education Council (2009) determined a number of obstacles for lifelong learning in the Netherlands. The varied offers of adult learning opportunities were discovered to be chaotic due to educational programmes both in the public and private sectors. The Council suggested making the supply of adult education more transparent. Also, the study highlighted the absence of a broad range of options for part-time higher education for adults in government-funded institutions. One setback is a lack of an overview and accurate supply of programmes meeting the demands of adult learners.

The Commission Veerman (2010) addressed the concerning situation of low participation rates in part-time higher education. This study stated that the funding formula is not favourable for lifelong learning students. The focus of the funding formula is on full-time students and their pace of studying. Part-time students tend to prefer studying on a flexible basis, which requires a different approach.

The European Association for the Education of Adults (2011) assessed the adult education situation in the Netherlands as well. The study claimed that higher education institutions are inadequately equipped to organise customised programmes for adults. The inflexibility of adult education was indicated as the key future concern in the Netherlands.

The inflexibility of part-time higher education programmes was also stressed by ResearchNed (2012). ResearchNed is an independent research institute that specialises in social-scientific research, policy advice, and knowledge transfer in the field of education. Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, ResearchNed Nijmegen conducted research on people's wishes and needs regarding part-time higher education. The study identified a wide range of problems contributing to low participation rates. The data gathered suggested that the economic crisis, and recent government policies like the *langstudeerboete*, negatively affected the participation rate. However, the fundamental problem of part-time higher education in the Netherlands was argued to be centred around the following:

Inflexibility in the way study programmes are organised and offered

The first problem of part-time higher education is the lack of possibilities to adjust the organisation and modes of study to the demands of students and employers. Resulting from the survey of ResearchNed (2012), the following barriers contribute to the problem:

- Limited use of e-learning/distance learning (p.15)
- Lack of possibilities to adjust to duration of study (p.32)
- Insufficient supply of education in modules (p.32)
- Reduction of opening hours outside office hours (p.34)

Lack of options for tailor-made study programmes

The second problem of part-time higher education is the lack of possibilities to adjust the content to the demands of students and employers. Resulting from the survey of ResearchNed (2012), the following barriers contribute to the problem:

- Poor adjustment of a programme content to a learner's workplace (p.32)
- Missing collaboration with companies in programmes design (p.32)
- A lack of recognition of prior learning (p.37)

In most European countries, the participation rates in part-time higher education has increased between 2000 and 2009 (ResearchNed, 2012). However, the Netherlands is part of a small group of countries where participation rates has declined. According to ResearchNed (2012), an increase in flexibility and more options for tailor-made part-time higher education is necessary to increase participation. In contrast to the Netherlands, part-time higher education in the United Kingdom, for example, tend to be more flexible as fast-track programmes and blended learning opportunities are more common. Besides, part-time higher education in countries like Finland and Norway tend to be more successful in offering tailor-made education than the Netherlands. Here, students have a huge

amount of freedom to compose their study programme of modules. Overall, the Netherlands is lagging behind other European countries in terms of flexible and tailor made part-time higher education.

Like the Commission Veerman (2010) report, ResearchNed (2012) called attention to higher education providers' low priority for part-time students. Through increasing participation rates of full-time students, not all institutions are interested to invest in part-time programmes. Institutions use their resources to accommodate the growing number of full-time students, which takes the focus away from part-time students. Moreover, part-time programmes are not seen as a profitable choice.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, highly valued ResearchNed's (2012) study because of the rich information gathered from both the surveys conducted with contact people from part-time higher education programmes and the interviews with a number of higher education providers and organisations in the branch. The Ministry decided to take the problems identified by ResearchNed (2012) as a starting point in formulating a policy strategy aimed to increase participation rates in part-time higher education. Inspiration, regarding policy solutions, was also drawn from an international comparative study on lifelong learning by Research en Beleid (2010). Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, Research en Beleid (2010) explored higher education policies regarding the participation of adults in Denmark, Sweden, Flanders (Belgium), Germany, the United Kingdom, and California (United States). Research en Beleid (2010) described four policy instruments likely to increase participation rates in adult education:

- Attaining flexibilisation of higher education provision and educational programmes
- Offering more, and better possibilities for online courses and blended learning
- Offering (financial) support for adults in participating in higher education.
- Aligning higher education provision and institutions with employers and the world of work.

For each policy-instrument, good practices have been identified, which can serve as inspiration for the part-time higher education policies. On the basis of these research reports' information, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science proposed, on the 30th of March 2012, the following four scenarios for part-time higher education:

Scenario 1: 'Making amendments to current legislation'

The first scenario aims to increase the flexibility of part-time higher education by making amendments to rules and regulations. By doing so, higher education institutions would have more freedom to provide flexible and tailor-made part-time programmes. Legal obstacles would be removed from the Higher Education and Research Act and the 'macrodoelmatigheidsbeleid'.

Scenario 2: 'Enforcing specific legislation for part-time higher education'

The second scenario is inspired by the adult higher education system of Denmark. Specific legislation would be implemented to steer the supply of flexible part-time higher education programmes. The focus of this scenario is strengthening cooperation with employers in order to make part-time higher education more attractive. Also, it aims to establish favourable access policies for part-time learners.

Scenario 3: 'Privatization of part-time higher education'

In the third scenario, part-time higher education would be privatised, which would mean ending public funding. A fair playing field would be created between private and public higher education

institutions, causing institutions to have to compete for students. Marketization is expected to result in a more demand-driven part-time higher education sector.

Scenario 4: 'Enforcement of 'Demand-driven-funding''

In the last scenario, a fair playing field would be created. Demand-driven funding by way of vouchers would be introduced. With the use of vouchers, students would buy part-time higher education and thus decide which accredited providers would receive public funds. In this scenario, part-time higher education would be expected to become more demand-driven, as institutions would have to compete for students and thus funding.

The four scenarios proposed are mainly based on the barriers towards flexible and tailor-made education as mentioned by the ResearchNed (2012) study and policy instruments suggested by Research en Beleid (2010). The scenarios will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

2.2 Debate on the success of the four scenarios in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education

Although each scenario is aimed at increasing the number of students enrolled in part-time higher education, the content differs significantly. There has been an inconclusive debate about the effectiveness of each scenario. Several stakeholders have shared their thoughts on the proposed scenarios.

The Dutch National Union of Students (2014) offered the government an alternative scenario with their proposal of the 'flexstudent'. An education system with flexible credits and tailor-made programmes has been put forward for part-time higher education in the Netherlands. This proposal is based on the education system in Sweden, where students are able to compose their own programme from a list of courses and study at their own pace. The Dutch National Union of Students is in favour of measures taken in scenario one as they result in more possibilities for distance education and the establishment of Centres of Expertise. However, the Dutch National Union of Students is strongly against privatization of part-time higher education as proposed in scenario 3. In their opinion, part-time higher education should remain a public good in order to ensure the quality of education. In their study, the Dutch National Union of Students argued that scenario 4 is privatization according to the European Competition Law. Besides, they do not advise alternative forms to finance part-time higher education, such as demand-driven funding. The Dutch National Union of Students warns for a limitation on the accessibility of student to relative expensive part-time study programmes.

The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (2013) aimed to give new impulses to flexible part-time higher education. The association is highly in favour of scenario 1, as the proposed legal amendments will allow institutions to provide more part-time education on extern locations and in modular form. The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences is sceptic about scenario four and ask the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to elaborate further on this proposal.

Also the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (2013) wants to provide modular part-time higher education which is prohibit by law at the moment. The legal amendments proposed in the first scenario will allow modular forms of education. Furthermore, the Association of Universities in

the Netherlands has sympathy for the idea of educational voucher as they recognised that change is needed.

The Netherlands Board for Training and Education (2013) is the strongest supporter of scenario 4 *demand-driven funding*. With the creation of an equal playing level field between public and private part-time higher education, the Netherlands Board for Training and Education expects the highest increase in participation rates. In addition, the Netherlands Board for Training and Education want the government to open up the infrastructure, paid with taxes, to private education institutions. If the infrastructures open up, the supply of private part-time higher education in sectors demanding expensive infrastructures like engineering is expected to grow.

The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (2014) favoured the fourth scenario. With the introduction of educational vouchers, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers expect higher education institutions to be more responsive to part-time students' educational needs. Besides, it wants to enhance the interrelatedness with the industry and to engage employers in part-time higher education, which is an important element in scenario two.

The debate on the success of the four scenarios in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education became even more heated after the Commissioner Rinnooy Kan (2014) presented the report *Flexible higher education for adults*. As commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science. The aim of the research was to provide guidelines for how to increase the flexibility and tailor-made aspect of adult higher education. The report concluded with the proposal of two controversial pilots. The pilots combined different aspects of the four scenarios proposed. The first pilot, 'flexibilisation', involved changing laws that hindered flexible study programmes in higher education, creating subsidies to stimulate part-time education in private and public institutions, and possibly accrediting incomplete part-time HBO programmes of non-government-funded institutions that met the demand of the labour market. The second pilot, Demand-Driven Funding, was focused on a new funding formula based on educational vouchers for students. In addition, it provided room for modular programmes, participation in phases, and more education outside of the institution. In 2014, the government decided it wanted to start to implement these pilots. However, different stakeholders showed restraints toward educational vouchers. The Dutch National Union of Students (2014) called it "a serious limitation on the accessibility and freedom of choice of students" (p. 26) and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (2014) stressed that "no research have indicated that it will help to raise student numbers" (p. 2). The unknown effect on student rates was also ascertained by the commission itself. Although the government plans to implement the two mentioned pilots, the choice of a certain policy strategy is not a foregone conclusion.

Chapter 3

3.1 Research methodology

This applied study seeks to analyse which of the four scenarios, proposed by the Dutch government, is expected to be the most successful in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education. An ex ante evaluation of the four scenarios was chosen to assess whether these scenarios are expected to achieve the desired impact. An ex ante evaluation is a forwards looking assessment of the likely future effects of scenario (Khandker, 2010). The impact of each of the four scenarios is thus

evaluated prior to the implementation of the scenario. The ex-ante evaluation in this study is mainly focus on the expected effectiveness of the scenarios. The assessment of effectiveness shows if and to what extent a scenario is expected to increase participation rates in part-time higher education. This implies that each of the four scenarios will be evaluated to identify its potential impact on participation rates in part-time higher education. The outcomes of the ex-ante evaluation of the four scenarios help to determine which scenario is expected to be the most successful in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education. Moreover, the ex-ante evaluation provides information which can be utilized to improve a scenario before it is implemented. It must be noted that an ex-ante evaluation is based on forecasts and prospects. The potential effects of the scenarios are thus based on expectations as the actual impact can only be evaluated after a scenario is implemented. Therefore, the major drawback of this evaluation approach is the fact that most of the benefits or cost will arise in the future and thus have to be estimated with uncertainty (Hujer, 2004). To increase the level of certainty of predictions made, cross-national comparisons are conducted with countries implementing similar policies.

In this study, the assumption was made that reducing barriers faced by potential learners in part-time higher education will increase the chance of higher participation rates. Consequently, a scenario, as proposed by the Dutch government, is seen as successful if it is expected to increase the chance of higher participation rate in part-time higher education. To be more specific, this study considers a scenario as successful if it is expected to increase the average proportion of part-time students to the EU average. The share of part-time students in higher education in the EU is on average 20%. However, the proportion of part-time higher education students in the Netherlands is 17% and thus below average (Bologna Key Statistics, figA4.a).

A literature review was conducted to identify the barriers preventing people from participating in part-time higher education. Afterward, an analytical framework was constructed based on barriers mentioned in the literature. This framework was used to determine which barriers are addressed in each of the four scenarios. A scenario which addresses the majority of barriers faced by potential part-time learners is expected to be more successful in increasing the participation rate than a scenario which does not. Conclusions will be made about the scenario which is expected to be the most successful in increasing participation rates in accredited part-time higher education programmes

3.2 Analytical framework on barriers to participation in part-time higher education

This section will begin with a prominent literature review on adult education to identify and categorize barriers to participation in part-time higher education. Afterwards, an analytical framework will be discussed, which will be used to evaluate each of the four scenarios on their expected ability to decrease barriers perceived in part-time higher education.

Barriers faced by adults wishing to pursue part-time higher education will be categorized according to the research of Cross (1981). Cross (1981) identified three groups of barriers to participation in adult education: situational, institutional and dispositional. Cross's (1981) research is the most well-known work on participation barriers to adult education. As also pointed out by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), little theoretical development has occurred in this field after the research of Cross

(1981). Although there have been numbers of empirical studies since then on barriers, no alternative theoretical models have been developed. Therefore, Cross's (1981) categorization will be used when analysing barriers to participation in adult education.

Cross (1981) gave, in her research, some ideas on specific barriers in each category. In an attempt to cover the full dimension of institutional barriers, this study will make use of Schuetze and Slowey's research (2002). Based on an international comparative study encompassing ten countries, Schuetze and Slowey (2002) identified six factors that influenced the participation of non-traditional students in higher education. These factors concern institutional issues that appeared to either inhibit or support participation. The six barriers to participation in adult education are: system differentiation and coordination, institutional governance, access, modes of study, and continuing education opportunities. Overall, the categorization of Cross (1981) is used which is complemented by the research of Schuetze and Slowey (2002) on institutional barriers to participation in higher education.

3.2.1 Situational barriers

The first category is situational barriers, which are external influences to the individual beyond his or her control. These barriers emerge from one's situation or environment. Situational barriers can be challenging because they are dependent on other factors than the learner him- or herself. This category has the following subcategories: distance, time constrains, and employer support.

Distance

Breder (1990) studied adults who did not participate in education and concluded that the distance to an education provider was the major reason for non-participation. Distance to an educational institution as a barrier was also shown in Poland. Here, many adults preferred to go to private universities in their own regions since this saved them travel time and subsistence costs (Mark, Pouget, Thomas, & ALPINE (Project), 2004). Also, Connor et al. (1999) suggested that non-traditional students placed more emphasis than traditional students on the location of the higher education institution and its distance from home. Nevertheless, individuals could move closer to educational institutions to overcome the distance barrier. However, a study of Gorard et al. (1997) found only a few adults who moved considerable distances in their lives. Furthermore, it is understandable that people who consider part-time learning while they have jobs are not willing to move far away from their workplaces.

Time constrains

It will never be easy for adults to combine family and/or work obligations with study programmes. A conflict between study and work/family may occur when the cumulative demands of these roles are incompatible in some respect. The Adult Education Survey (2015) explored the difficulties faced by people participating in lifelong learning. The data showed two main obstacles: Work schedule and training conflicts and family responsibilities. Both obstacles are related to time constrains experienced by non-traditional learners. The study showed that, in most European countries, family responsibilities are mentioned more than work responsibilities as a barrier. Furthermore, the report mentioned that the importance of conflict with the work schedule increased as the educational attainment of respondents increased, while time conflicts due to family responsibilities similarly affected all adults (European Commission, 2015).

Kirby et al. (2004) researched the factors associated with higher levels of stress at home and work for adult students attending weekend college programmes. From the participants, 40% reported that attending school interfered with family time or events. In the survey of Malhorta et al. (2002) on barriers of adult education, childcare was stated as the most important family commitment. Having young children is an obvious constraint that limits the possibilities of studying. In the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE, 2000) survey, 13% of all women cited childcare as a barrier to participation.

On the whole, adult students tend to find themselves on tight schedules when they have to combine their family, work, and study obligations. Time-related issues are a great obstacle for adults returning to education and training. An education model that allows these non-traditional students to choose time and pace of learning is likely to reduce barriers created by distance from the educational institution and time constraints caused by family and work commitments

Employer support

A lack of employer support for education is the last situational barrier for participation. The opportunities to study while working largely depend on the extent to which employers support their staff in higher education studies (Schuller et al., 1997). An employer could provide various benefits to his or her employees taking part in education, such as financial support or learning hours during working time (Bamber & Tett, 2000). However, financial support from employers is typically provided for short-term programmes only and, therefore, cannot be used for participating in academic programmes (Schuetze, 1996). Also, the employer could provide information about different educational programmes and give advice. Moreover, employers could motivate their employees by promising them rewards, such as promotions, when they have completed an educational programme. This is important since career advancement is often the largest motivational factor for adults to participate in higher education (Yan-Fung & Tasz-Man, 1999). When an employer's supportive attitude and engagement with employees who study is missing or not sufficient, a barrier to participation in education results. Generally, the attitude of employers, in the Netherlands, can be described as passive acceptance, which means that employers do not prohibit employees to take part in higher education, but neither do they create favourable conditions to motivate staff (Saar et al., 2014).

3.2.2 Institutional barriers

The second category is institutional barriers. Barriers resulting from the way higher educational institutions design, deliver, and manage learning activities fall into this category. The focus is on those practices and procedures within these institutions that exclude or discourage adults from participating in part-time higher education. Like situational barriers, institutional barriers are outside the control of the learner. This category has the following subcategories derived from the research of Schuetze and Slowey (2002): system differentiation and coordination, institutional governance, access, modes of study, and continuing education opportunities.

System differentiation and coordination

The first factor, system differentiation and coordination, is focused on the degree to which higher education systems are diversified. A diversified higher education system will provide options for a broader range of students. According to Guri-Rosenblit (2006), there tends to be a relationship

between the diversification and flexibility patterns of higher education systems and their access policies. The more diversified and flexible a higher education systems is, the more likely its access policy favours non-traditional students.

Diversification in higher education institutions is either horizontal or vertical. Horizontal differentiation is driven by increased demand for higher education. Institutions start to focus on a particular student body or study field and thus create their own profiles. Also, the emergence of non-university institutions contribute to horizontal differentiation. Vertical differentiation is the result of an increased demand for a greater diversity of graduates. Education institutions are ranked vertically on their reputation and quality. The research of Bron and Agelli (2000) and Schuetze (2000) showed that non-traditional students are more often admitted to universities in less vertically diversified education systems. New educational institutions and non-university institutions, especially, accept more non-traditional students.

Another institutional problem are the dead-end routes. In some countries, "vocational and general education are highly segregated which makes it hard to progress from secondary vocational to tertiary studies" (Boeren, 2008,p.16). Dead-end routes fail to allow students to progress to further education at higher levels. Also, students returning to education after leaving the system or adults combining work and education could be trapped in routes that do not permit such progression. Coordination between different programmes and institutions, with regard to their access policies and enhancing the status or reputation of vocational training, could prevent dead-end routes (Schuetze & Slowey, 2000)

Broadly, minimal horizontal differentiation or too much vertical differentiation in a higher education system results in inflexibility for non-traditional learners. Also, dead-end routes impose barriers to participation for non-traditional students.

Institutional governance

The second factor is institutional governance, which refers to the internal structure, organisation, and management of educational institutions. The governance and management of an education provider has influence on the "flexibility with regard to the organisation of studies, content of curriculums and programs and institutional policies" (Schuetze & Slowey, p. 316). If higher education institutions are restricted by state regulations or not interested in new types of students, institutional governance and control structures becomes unfavourable for non-traditional students. The degree of an institution's autonomy can greatly influence that institution's ability to be flexible to non-traditional learners. Barriers are national regulations that restrict institutions responses to the needs of non-traditional students. Even when higher education institutions have been assigned broad responsibilities under legislation, specific state rules and regulations can restrict policies to better serve non-traditional students. The European University Association Lisbon Declaration (2007) established the following four basic dimensions of autonomy:

- Academic autonomy: Deciding on degree supply, student number and selection, curriculum, and study fields
- Financial autonomy: Acquiring and allocating funding, deciding on tuition fees, and accumulating surplus
- Organisational autonomy: Setting structures and statutes, making contracts, and electing decision-making bodies and people

- Staffing autonomy: Responsibility for recruitment, salaries, and promotions.

This categorization is a helpful framework to assess the different dimensions of institutional autonomy of higher education institutions.

Second, public higher education providers may not be interested in non-traditional students since these students are well served by private institutions. Competing over non-traditional students is often not seen as beneficial since investments are high and returns uncertain due to high drop-out rates. Furthermore, institutions may not invest in non-traditional students since they have to deal with an expanding traditional student body (ResearchNed, 2012). The European Association for the Education of Adults (2014) survey confirmed that adult education is not prioritised in the European member states. Institutions have to show responsibility and awareness in order to make lifelong learning successful. Altogether, restricted institutional autonomy or a lack of interest hinders the institutional flexibility needed to provide access to non-traditional students.

Access

The third factor is access. Non-traditional learners are faced with traditional entry qualifications when applying for admission. However, not all traditional learners have traditional entry qualifications, such as an upper secondary school diploma. What is needed are special entry routes, such as entry examinations and access courses. These are examples of open and flexible access policies of education providers.

Another barrier to participation is the lack of recognition of prior learning. Prior learning assessment is a process whereby people are provided with an opportunity to have skills and knowledge developed outside the formal education system assessed and valued against qualifications frameworks (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2006). The purpose of recognition of prior learning (RPL) is to gain access to a higher education programme or to gain credits toward a higher education qualification (European Commission, 2013). Formal education is recognized by a framework of degrees, certificates, and diplomas, but the recognition of non-formal learning is non-existent or chaotic. Nevertheless, non-traditional learners are likely to learn additional skills and competences outside the initial education and training system. Often these prior experiences remain unrecognised, which does not contribute to lifelong learning.

Livingstone (1999) explored in his survey informal and non-formal learning practices in Canada. Over 60% of the respondents indicated that they would be more likely to enrol in an educational programme if they could receive formal acknowledgement of their past learning experiences and, therefore, have to take fewer courses to finish the programme. Unrecognized prior learning is thus seen as a barrier for education later in life. Recognition of prior experiential learning will prevent situations in which students are asked to re-learn what they already know. The RPL process will enable a learner to demonstrate that he or she has the capacity to successfully finish a study programme. Moreover, a student might receive the provision to skip parts of the programme. Consequently, the time to earn a qualification will be shortened due to the recognition of current competencies. Overall, students' motivations and self-esteem will increase when programmes build on their current knowledge and when programme time lengths decrease.

The problem of non-transferable credits is also an aspect of a lack of recognition of prior learning. Adult learners want to earn credentials as quickly as possible. However, higher education institutions with little cross-institutional collaboration create barriers to achieving this goal (U.S Department of

Labour, 2007). Transferability of credits earned from one institution to another is uncertain, and often credits from profit institutions are rejected by traditional higher education colleges. To address this problem, educational institutions and systems need to become more interconnected because repeating knowledge already learnt, as well as a lack of credit accumulation, is a barrier to participation for non-traditional learners (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002).

Altogether, traditional admission requirements and the absence or insufficient recognition of prior informal and formal learning are barriers for non-traditional learners wishing to pursue higher education.

Modes of study

The next institutional factor is modes of study. Non-traditional learners have a hard time participating in traditional forms of education. Traditional education is characterized by campus-based provisions and by time schedules, and student services are designed for the traditional student. However, non-traditional learners are often employed and have domestic responsibilities, which makes it difficult for them to participate in modes of study designed for young, full-time, traditional students. Therefore, flexible modes of study, which accommodate the special needs of non-traditional students, are important. Flexible modes of study include distance education, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), blended learning, modular courses, and part-time programmes.

Siu (2005) observed that flexible timetable arrangements and learning environments are highly valued among adult learners. Due to time constraints, adults learners often have interrupted patterns of participation and diverse progression routes in education (Gorard & Rees, 2002). Frequently, education programmes lack appropriate provisions to meet the demands of adults who are not able to complete a programme without time interruptions. Adults tend to be more in favour of modular education programmes, which have shorter durations than whole study programmes. Also, modular programmes provide adults with the opportunity to take breaks between two modules.

The European Association for the Education of Adults accentuate the “one size does not fit all” approach regarding adult learning (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2013). The need for tailor-made learning programmes was highlighted because existing learning offers do not fit adults needs. When learners are allowed the freedom to choose and combine their own educational modules, learning pathways become more individual. Therefore, modular programmes will fit better with the existing knowledge and enshrine the needs of a learner, which will make continuous learning more interesting for working people willing to specialize in their field or broaden their knowledge to follow a form of part-time education. Moreover, employers will be more supportive of their employees following modular education programmes since the duration is shorter and the obtained knowledge will better fit the needs of a company than the traditional education programmes.

A further barrier is the extent to which the curriculum aligns with the needs of a particular group of students (Dogra, 2004). Curriculums need to be attractive to retain non-traditional students. Curriculums based on traditional students will not meet the demands of non-traditional students and thus will need adjustments. For a working non-traditional student, a curriculum involving on-the-job training in combination with related courses could be appealing, for example. Adjusting the

curriculum to a specific group of learners was successful in increasing participation rates, as shown in the research of Apostoli (2005), DiGregorio et al. (2000), and Saunders et al. (2004). Thus, inflexible provisions of education, in terms of time and place, and the lack of curriculums based on the needs of non-traditional students form a barrier to participation.

Financial support

Financing a higher education career is an important consideration for non-traditional learners. Financial difficulties can be classified as either situational or institutional barriers, depending on the situation. Financial problems are situational when a person does not have access to sufficient funds to pay for his or her study. The problem becomes an institutional issue when admission and registration fees are high or when learners are required to purchase costly learning materials. The state imposes a financial barrier by applying inflexible mechanisms to provide financial support. For example, the constraints on many financial support schemes are based on age. As a result, older students are not eligible for assistance even if they are in full-time, credit-bearing study programmes. Moreover, gaps exist in many support systems for part-time or distance students. Also, loan schemes that do not make repayment conditional on higher income after completion of a study, are seen as a barrier to participation by non-traditional students (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002). Ultimately, financing systems with a missing focus on lifelong learning withhold non-traditional student participation in higher education.

Continuing education opportunities

The last institutional factor is continuing education opportunities. Nowadays, an overwhelming majority of programmes in public higher education institutions are credit-earning programmes. However, not all non-traditional learners wish to obtain a degree. Non-degree seeking students are students taking selected courses who are not accepted into a degree program. Non-degree programs are not the exclusive domain of government-funded higher education institutions since many private institutions are also active in this field. Non-traditional students participate in non-degree programmes and courses for career and job purposes or for personal reasons. The advantage of non-degree programmes is the admission procedure, which is less strict than a degree programme. Also, employers tend to prefer sending their employees to non-credit bearing courses because these often specialize in workplace-relevant skills and know-how (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). Additionally, non-degree programmes provide an opportunity for non-traditional students to become more familiar with graduate programmes, which makes the step toward a credit-based programme smaller. Overall, a lack of non-credit-earning programs is seen as a barrier to adult education .

3.2.3 Dispositional Barriers

The last category is dispositional barriers, which relates to the attitudes and self-perceptions of the learners. Dispositional barriers are negative attitudes and perceptions about adult education. Several personal constraints restrain non-traditional students from participating in higher education.

Personal constraints

Lifelong learning is a voluntary act of learning throughout life driven by self-motivation. However, not all people feel interested and excited about learning, which could be the result of earlier experiences with education or situational circumstances, like family responsibilities.

Using Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs's (1973) survey, Malhotra et al. (2007) conducted research to identify the barriers to participation in education for adults. In addition to the institutional barriers, as discussed by Schuetze and Slowey (2002), personal reasons were mentioned for constrained continued learning. These factors are categorized as "bad experiences" and provide a good overview of the dispositional barriers perceived by non-traditional learners:

- Low grades or lack of confidence in personal ability
- Studying is not enjoyable
- Fears of being too old
- Weary of school
- Program requirements not met

These factors refer to a person's motivation and self-confidence. Although, according Schuetze and Slowey (2002), the last factor is an institutional barrier concerning access, it is placed in a personal category by Malhotra et al. (2007). In addition to negative past educational experiences, poor learning perceptions constrain adults from entering higher education. Fear concerning learning abilities and low self-confidence are the main personal barriers (Keith, 2007). Another barrier for adult learners is age concerns. The average age of non-traditional learners is higher than that of traditional students, and many adults worried about fitting in with the younger students.

The Adult Education Survey (2015) asked respondents to indicate the reason for their non-participation. On average, more than 80% of the non-participants stated they had no interest in participating in education. In particular, adults with an education level below higher education showed less interest than adults who had completed higher education studies. Awareness raising and outreach activities could be helpful to make adults aware of all the learning possibilities suitable for them. Major publicly subsidised activities could help raise awareness of adult education and training. Overall, a diverse range of personal constraints could restrain non-traditional students from participating in higher education.

3.3 Remarks on the barriers to participation

The outline of barriers within Cross's (1981) categorization contribute to a complex model of deterrents to participation in higher education. However, some remarks are needed. The intensity of the category of the barrier perceived depends on the composition of the population. There are different types of adults, who can be generally divided into those who want to participate in education and those who do not. The first group is mostly affected by situational and institutional barriers, while the second is more affected by dispositional barriers. Regarding the situation of part-time higher education in the Netherlands, it seems logical for the Dutch government to first implement a policy that serves adults who want to participate. Consequently, a policy primarily should address situational and institutional barriers because adults who want to learn part-time are more affected by the these two groups of barriers. In contrast, adults who do not want to learn part-time are mostly affected by the dispositional barriers. Therefore, this study will exclude the dispositional barriers in the assessment of the four scenarios proposed by the Dutch government. Nevertheless, the exclusion of the dispositional barriers does not mean that these barriers are not important. However, some careful predictions indicate that decreasing institutional and situational barriers will, consequently, result in reduced dispositional barriers (Wodlinger, 2007; Wodlinger &

Muetze, 1993). Furthermore, dispositional barriers are more challenging for public policy to address and to overcome because they include individual barriers, while situational and institutional barriers are, in nature, structural barriers (Van Noord, 2006). Ultimately, it is also important to aim to overcome the personal constraints persons might have, as it is desirable to get everyone the skills needed to participate in the knowledge economy.

The last institutional barrier to participation of non-traditional students, identified by Scheutze and Slowey (2002), is a lack of continuing education opportunities. This barrier decreases if the possibilities for students to follow non-degree courses increase. Creating a learning environment in which students can follow degree-bearing, as well as non-degree, courses is essential for a lifelong learning society. Although the Dutch government also aims to promote lifelong learning in general and thus also non-degree education, the government focussed is on increasing participation rates in accredited part-time higher education programmes. Accreditation ensures a level of quality of services and operation of higher education institutions which is valued by the Dutch government . (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015, 30012.51). Therefore, a lack of continuing education opportunities is not included as a barrier in the analytical framework of this study.

As previously mentioned, the Dutch government aimed to increase the participation of part-time higher education programmes that have been accredited. The procedure and rules for accreditation are outlined in Article 5 of the Higher Education and Research Act, which can be applied both to public and private higher education institutions. Accreditation is seen as a quality label in the Netherlands, and therefore, the government seeks to increase participation in accredited part-time higher education programmes. However, the last institutional barrier to participation underlined the need to provide non-degree courses and programmes in higher education (Scheutze & Slowey, 2002).

Increasing participation in non-degree part-time higher education programmes does not comply with the wishes of the Dutch government. Therefore, the institutional barrier, lack of continuing education opportunities, was excluded in the evaluation of the four scenarios for part-time higher education in the Netherlands.

Another point is the barrier lack of time in the situational barriers category. Lack of time is a vague construct as underlined by Desjardins (2014). When people stress that they have a lack of time for learning activities, family and work commitments are often blamed. However, having family/work commitments does not mean that spare time does not exist. Spare time can exist but may be preferably spent on activities other than part-time higher education, as education is not prioritised. Furthermore, lack of time tends to be a socially accepted reason for not taking part in education (Larson & Milana, 2006). Lack of time may hide other reasons for not participating in part-time education, which makes it difficult to pin down the exact barrier.

This research assumes that if the institutional barriers time interruptions and inflexibility regarding time/place decrease, the situational barrier lack of time will decrease as well. When students are able to have time interruptions within an education programme, it will become easier to fit education around their work and family responsibilities. Additionally, as the institutional barrier inflexibly regarding time and place decreases, the situational barriers distance and lack of time should decrease too. The inflexibility regarding time and place of programmes can be overcome through the use of online learning. Online learning methods give students control over the time and

place of learning. Students can access online education whenever they want and this type of education is likely to fit into any schedule. Moreover, student do not have to make travel arrangements since learning is done virtually. Overall, there appears to be a relationship between the barriers distance and time and the barriers time interruptions and inflexible programmes, regarding time and space.

Regarding the ability of policy measures to target the barriers, there tends to be a difference between situational barriers and institutional barriers. Policy measures can have a direct effect on institutional barriers in contrast to situational barriers, which are targeted more indirectly. Governments can establish new rules or change existing ones to force or to stimulate educational providers to change their management in order to decrease institutional barriers. In contrast, situational barriers are less straightforward, and therefore, the effect of policy measures tends to be more uncertain. Nevertheless, in the evaluation of the four scenarios proposed by the Dutch government, some ideas will be given as to the possible effects of the scenarios on situational barriers.

To review, the theory of Cross (1981) and Schuetze and Slowey (2002) were used as a basis to identify the barriers to participation in part-time higher education perceived by potential learners. Taking into account the wishes of the Dutch government regarding part-time higher education, this study has developed an analytical framework useful for evaluating the four scenarios proposed by the Dutch government. The analytical framework can be found in Figure 1.

Situational Barriers

- Distance
- Time constrains
- Employer support

Institutional barriers

- System differentiation and coordination
 - Horizontal differentiation
 - Dead-end routes
- Institutional governance
 - Institutional autonomy
 - No interest
- Access
 - Admission criteria
 - Recognition prior learning
- Mode of study
 - Time interruptions
 - Inflexible regarding time/space
 - Non-individualised curriculums
- Financial support
 - Government funding

Figure 1: Analytical framework to evaluate the four scenarios proposed for part-time higher education.

Chapter 4

4.1 Ex-ante evaluation of the Four Scenarios proposed for part-time higher education

In this chapter, an ex-ante evaluation will be conducted on each of the four scenarios proposed by the Dutch government for part-time higher education. Each scenario will be evaluated on its expected success to overcome barriers to participation in part-time higher education. An overview of the barriers was given in the analytical framework Figure 1. The evaluation of each scenario is displayed in a Goeller scorecard using colours. An explanation of the colours is given in Figure 2. In the next section conclusions will be drawn on the expected success of each scenario.

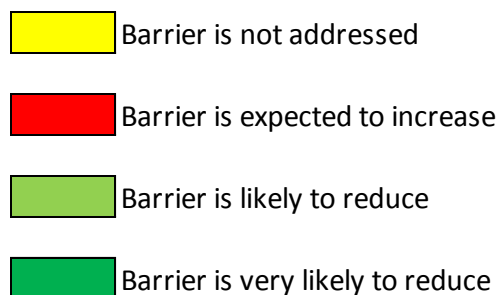


Figure 2: Explanation colours used in the Goeller Scorecard

4.1.1 Scenario 1: Making amendments in current legislation

The first policy scenario seeks to increase the flexibility in part-time higher education by making amendments to current rules and regulations. The scenario includes three measures related to the Higher education and Research Act and the *macrodoelmatigheidsbeleid*. There are several legal obstacles that hinder higher education institutions from attempting to provide flexible part-time programmes responsive to the needs of part-time learners. The underlying problem is the missing distinction between full-time and part-time higher education in legislation. As a result, part-time education programmes have to meet the same requirements as full-time programmes. However, part-time higher education programmes are focused on non-traditional students, which require a different approach. Currently, institutions providing part-time education programmes find it hard to meet the demands of students because institutions feel they are restricted by legal provisions based on full-time higher education. Hence, three actions were proposed by the Dutch government to minimise perceived legislative barriers in providing demand driven part-time higher education.

The first concrete case within the Dutch legal framework that forms a barrier involves the *Onderwijs-en examenregeling*, Article 7.13 in the Higher Education and Research Act. The article establishes a range of demands concerning the provision of education and exam regulation for every study programme. Educational institutions have difficulty interpreting the article because it seems to assume fixed curriculums (Buitinkck et al., 2010). This presumption makes educational institutions uncertain about the room available for tailor-made study programmes. However, in order to serve the diverse population of part-time learners, greater flexibility in the curriculum design has been deemed necessary. Making clear to what extent Article 7.13 allows flexible curriculums would have a direct positive influence on the barrier of non-individualized curriculums in the category of modes of

study. Clarification of Article 7.13 would remove uncertainties for institutions and would encourage them to explore the possibilities of providing tailor-made curriculums. One step further is to change Article 7.13 to allow modular education in which students could pick and mix sets of courses. A modular curriculum can be tailored to suit the personal needs and interests of learners or other stakeholders, such as employers. Moreover, institutions may allow time interruptions in curriculums, for example, between two modules. Learners following single modules instead of full programmes are likely to receive more support from their employers (Higher Education Careers Services Unit, 2013).

A second problem is the *vestigingsplaatsbeginsel* (Art. 7.17 HERA). This article demands two-thirds of education be provided at the location of the higher education institution. As a result, distance education is restricted. Removal of the *vestigingsplaatsbeginsel* would give institutions the chance to deliver whole or large parts of part-time education programmes outside the traditional classroom setting. A shift towards an increased use of online education could be expected, which would make the modes of study more flexible regarding time and space. For example, part-time programmes could take a blended learning approach, which combined online and in-person learning. Also, higher educational providers could offer full part-time programmes online. A larger use of online education would be attractive for part-time learners because they would be able to learn wherever and whenever they wanted. The situational barrier of time constraints would be likely to decrease too since part-time learners could fit online learning into their work and family schedules. Moreover, the barrier of distance to the higher education institution would be reduced because part-time students would not have to travel all the time to the education provider since they could take more online classes. If the *vestigingsplaatsbeginsel* was no longer in force, institutions could also opt to provide more education on the work floor. As a consequence, institutions could design more programmes in cooperation with employers, which is likely to increase employer support.

Thirdly, through *macrodoelmatigheidsbeleid*, the number of part-time higher education programmes is limited. If higher education institutions want to set up a new programme, they have to send a request to the Central Register for Higher Education Programmes for recognition. As part of the procedure of recognition, the programme is examined on several criteria. The aim of the policy is to structure the supply of education programmes through an examination of the relevance of the study programme for the society, labour market, and student demand. Basically, new programmes are not allowed if similar existing programmes already meet the demand. The problem is the examination of new programmes with regard to similar existing programmes. No distinction is made between full-time and part-time programmes. Consequently, establishing a part-time programme is not allowed if a sufficient number of similar full-time studies are offered. The policy results in a limited amount of offered part-time education. Amending the *macrodoelmatigheidsbeleid* by making a distinction between full-time and part-time programmes could lead to more opportunities to offer part-time programmes in different sectors and could create possibilities for institutions to create specific profiles targeted for part-time learners. Targeting different student clienteles would enhance horizontal differences between higher education institutions. Thus, it is hypothesised that an increase in the total number of offered part-time programmes and the possibility to offer part-time programmes in new sectors will contribute to the horizontal diversification of the higher education system at large. In sum, the third measure in Scenario 1 presumably addresses the barrier lack of horizontal diversification in the higher education system. However, the other barrier addressed is the lack of institutional governance.

The changes in law proposed in Scenario 1 would contribute to higher levels of academic institutional autonomy regarding part-time higher education. Institutions would be given more freedom in their curriculum designs and methods of teaching. Part-time higher education providers now have the possibility to extend the amount of online learning used and to offer programmes in external locations. Although autonomy does not mean the absence of regulation, the proposed changes would increase autonomy as the state provides a better framework in which institutions provide part-time higher education. Increasing institutional autonomy is not the goal in itself but is a vital precondition for a vibrant part-time higher education sector in the Netherlands.

A summary of the barriers to participation in relation to Scenario 1 is given in Table 1. Scenario 1 has great potential to decrease situational barriers to participation in part-time higher education. This potential is the result of the expected increase in the use of online education in part-time higher education after the changes are made in law. However, online education is already allowed in part-time higher education and only an increased use will result in a decrease of a certain barrier. Employer support is likely to increase since curriculums can be customized to the employer and student needs. Also, there is more room to provide a large part of education on the work floor. Engaging employers in the design of a curriculum is a strong predictor for support. Although employers may be more interested in designing educational programmes that can take place on the work floor, this effect is not known for certain. Institutional autonomy is very likely to increase as institutions are given more academic autonomy.

Scenario 1 does not directly address the following barriers to participation in part-time higher education: access and financial support.

Table 1: Barriers to participation in part-time higher education in relation to Scenario 1

	Situational barriers			Institutional barriers									
	Distance	Time	Employer support	System differentiation and coordination		Institutional governance		Access		Mode of study			Financial support
				Horizontal diversification	Dead-end routes	Institutional autonomy	No interest	Admission criteria	Recognition prior learning	Time interruptions	Inflexible regarding time/space	Non-individualized curriculums	Government funding
Scenario 1													

- Barrier is not addressed
- Barrier is expected to increase
- Barrier is likely to reduce
- Barrier is very likely to reduce

4.1.2 Scenario 2: Enforcing specific legislation for part-time higher education

In the second scenario, specific legislation for part-time higher education would be enforced. This scenario is based on adult higher education in Denmark. Since 1 January 2001, the Danish government has enforced the Adult Education Reform, which has separated adult education from the regular education system. The separate system for government funded adult higher education is called The Parallel Competence System and has education qualifications available at levels corresponding to those of the ordinary competence system. A distinction is made between three types of programmes, which differ in education levels (EHEA, 2011). In addition to a coherent system of different levels within adult education, the government allowed institutions to impose fees for part-time higher education. Students pay no fee for full-time higher education in Denmark and, therefore, providing part-time education is of financial interest for institutions. The set-up of an independent education system for adult education has received positive feedback and the number of adults participating in education is the highest in the European Union (Eurostat, 2015). The Dutch government was inspired by the Danish performance and wanted to use elements of the Danish adult education policy in its own policy for part-time higher education. However, the content of the second scenario is poorly described. No specific measures are mentioned in the proposal, which makes this scenario the most abstract of the four. Nevertheless, the implementation of a separate part-time higher education system, based on the adult higher education system in Denmark, is likely to decrease several barriers to participation. The effects of a separate part-time higher education system are based on the three goals of the adult education system described by the Danish government.

First, an independent part-time higher education system converts the supply of part-time higher education into a coherent and transparent system, which implies strong government regulation aimed at bringing structure to the fragmented market of part-time higher education. A clear system would ensure that programmes function at known and comparable levels. Moreover, the system would provide better and more visible opportunities for part-time higher education. A common framework of part-time higher education with programmes offered in separate institutions would provide clarification for all stakeholders. The simplification and clarification of the system should be directed not only towards the public authorities, but also towards individuals. If the supply of part-time higher education became more coherent and transparent, it would become easier to detect and avoid dead-end routes. A better progression to further education at higher levels or into the labour market could be assured since the government would have an increased say in the types of programmes offered. Good possibilities for bridging education programmes and educational levels would decrease the dead-end route barrier to participation (Unesco, 2008). A single system of part-time higher education might reduce the diversity of programmes offered, which is not desirable when serving a diverse population of learners. As a result, horizontal diversification could be reduced. To solve the tension between diversity and coherence, it would be important that well-adapted programmes targeted to particular groups of individuals were in place.

The second goal of a separate part-time higher education system is better and easier access to programmes through an access policy concentrated on recognition of prior learning, relevant working experience, and flexible admission criteria. To ensure an open access policy, the Dutch government could design special laws obligating part-time programmes to consider the needs and

experience of the learner. In Denmark, such legislation is in force and has made exceptional efforts toward open access to education for adults.

The third goal is to enhance the interrelatedness with the industry and to engage employers in part-time higher education. In Denmark, there is a long standing tradition of involving the social partners in adult education; these partners have been attributed as significant influences defined by law (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2011). Social partners might be represented in educational advisory committees and could play an active role in defining study programmes. Companies could also contribute to the content of education programmes by providing case studies and workplace learning possibilities. Strengthening the relationship with the social partners could be improved in Dutch part-time higher education. The government and the social partners must agree that an enhanced effort in part-time higher education is a shared responsibility. Public and private enterprises must be encouraged to become learning workplaces to a greater degree and to help the development of human resources (Unesco, 2008). A better integration of education in the workplace would extend to the variety of learning possibilities and would make part-time education options more visible for employees. The involvement of social partners and enterprises in counselling on the content of part-time education programmes would result in the development of competences corresponding to the demand of the enterprises and the requirements of the labour market. The barrier lack of employer support would be likely to decrease. Employers would be expected to be more supportive of their employees' part-time learning because the programme would be directed toward their business needs as a result of the tripartite organisation of education.

A summary of the barriers to participation in relation to Scenario 2 is given in Table 2. A separate education system for part-time higher education is expected to address a diverse range of barriers because it implies a comprehensive policy with several goals. Indirectly, all barriers, except financial support, are likely to be addressed as the result of pushing government to demand-driven part-time higher education. Strong commitment of the Dutch government and social partners is a pre-requisite to make this scenario successful. Employer support is likely to grow because there would be a strong focus on active engagement of employers. Also, a coherent and transparent education system for part-time higher education would make it easier to establish clear progression routes. However, diversification within the part-time higher education system might be reduced as government regulations increase. Nevertheless, diversification in the whole educational system is likely to increase as the government establishes a separate system for part-time higher education. The part-time higher education sector would become more regulated in Scenario 2, which would increase the barrier of institutional governance. The second goal of a separate part-time higher education system is to ensure favourable admission criteria and recognition of prior learning. The extent of success would depend on the content of legislation, regarding access policies for part-time higher education, implemented by the Dutch government. Although not explicitly mentioned in the three goals of a separate part-time higher education system, flexible modes of study possibilities are expected.

Table 2: Barriers to participation in part-time higher education in relation to Scenario 2

	Situational barriers			Institutional barriers									
	Distance	Time	Employer support	System differentiation and coordination		Institutional governance		Access		Mode of study			Financial support
				Horizontal diversification	Dead-end routes	Institutional autonomy	No interest	Admission criteria	Recognition prior learning	Time interruptions	Inflexible regarding time/space	Non-individualized curriculums	Government funding
Scenario 2													

- Barrier is not addressed
- Barrier is expected to increase
- Barrier is likely to reduce
- Barrier is very likely to reduce

4.1.3 Scenario 3: Privatisation of part-time higher education

The third scenario calls for privatisation of part-time higher education. Privatisation implies the “transfer of assets, management, functions or responsibilities (relating to education) previously owned or carried out by the state to private actors” (Coomanz et al., 2005, p.1). By forcing part-time higher education providers to behave like private providers and compete for resources, the government expects an increase in demand driven programmes and flexibility, and thus an increase in participation rates.

The Dutch model of part-time higher education is special because public and private institutions offer credit-bearing programmes. Both types of education providers have to meet accreditation requirements for credit bearing part-time programmes, but only public institutions receive government funding. Nevertheless, private institutions are allowed to offer modular education and are not bound by the *vestigingsbeginsel*. Clearly, there is not a fair and equal playing level field. Although private education institutions do not receive public funding, they accommodate 80.000 students in accredited part-time study programmes (Rinooy Kan, 2014). The number of students significantly increased in the last century and has been stable since the economic crises in 2008. Private education providers invested considerable money in the risky market of part-time higher education and have successfully developed new learning concepts and technologies (Netherlands Board for Training and Education, 2013). Thus, private institutions are more successful in the field of part-time higher education than public institutions, where student numbers have decreased dramatically. Therefore, why the government subsidises public part-time education programmes when these institutions evidently fail to meet the demand of the students must be questioned. Privatisation of the part-time higher education sector is expected to push institutions into adopting the students’ education demands.

Privatisation of part-time higher education is believed to make education more responsive to the needs of the student and employer alike (Kishan, 2008). The Netherlands Board for Training and Education (2014) emphasised the long tradition of private part-time higher education and its

specialized knowledge in adult education. Moreover, private institutions are characterized by flexible, tailor-made education, and customer-oriented policies. Specialization, flexibility, and tailor-made education tend to be central values in a privatised education market. Therefore, privatisation of part-time higher education has the potential to remove all barriers to participation (except from financial support). However, it is hard to say how part-time higher education would appear in a privatised market and thus which barriers would be decreased for learners. In the proposal for this scenario, the government expressed great concerns about possible consequences, specifically regarding the decrease in part-time programmes offered in sectors that require large investments, like Health and Engineering. A limited number of part-time higher education programmes in sectors that require large investment is not desirable because these sectors are highly relevant for the economy (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015, 30012.51). Also, accessibility might be threatened because tuition fees might rise as subsidies for part-time higher education providers disappear. Hence, new barriers to participation might appear as the diversification of supply decreases and fees increase. Scenario 3's success in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education is doubtful.

A summary of the barriers to participation in relation to Scenario 3 is given in Table 3. Market forces are expected to make part-time higher education more responsive to the needs of the students and employers. All situational and institution barriers (except financial support) to participation are likely to decrease as part-time education becomes more demand driven. Institutional (academic) autonomy, especially, should increase as several legal provisions are changed. The *vestigingsplaatsbeginsel* would be abolished and modular education allowed. Furthermore, privatisation of part-time higher education means letting go of the *macrodoelmatigheidsbeleid*. These legal measures are pre-conditions for privatisation of part-time higher education. However, privatisation does not mean ending all government regulation in part-time higher education. The government would still be responsible, for example, for the accreditation of part-time programmes. One barrier is expected to form an even larger obstacle to participation: Lack of government support. Students would not receive any form of public funding in Scenario 3, which is expected to have an impact on the equality of access (Nicholas, 2014).

Table 3: Barriers to participation in part-time higher education in relation to Scenario 3

	Situational barriers			Institutional barriers									
	Distance	Time	Employer support	System differentiation and coordination		Institutional governance		Access		Mode of study			Financial support
				Horizontal diversification	Dead-end routes	Institutional autonomy	No interest	Admission criteria	Recognition prior learning	Time interruptions	Inflexible regarding time/space	Non-individualized curriculums	Government funding
Scenario 3													

- Barrier is not addressed
- Barrier is expected to increase
- Barrier is likely to reduce
- Barrier is very likely to reduce

4.1.4 Scenario 4: Enforcement of demand-driven funding

In the fourth scenario, the funding model of part-time higher education would change to demand-driven funding. Instead of appropriating funds directly to public higher education institutions, the state would instead provide education vouchers to part-time higher education students. In the general meeting about part-time higher education on the 10th of March 2015, the demand-driven funding scenario was elaborated. Although this scenario was thoughtfully discussed, some aspects remained unclear since the content of the final policy depends on the outcome of the demand-driven funding pilot.

With the vouchers, students would become costumers who “shop” for part-time higher education. The value of each voucher would be 1250 euro, and vouchers would be given to students who earned 30 credits in a part-time education programme. Varying the value of the education vouchers is an idea that has caught the interested of the government. Students could be stimulated to participate in part-time programmes in sectors that are important for the Dutch economy. Whether the variation in vouchers’ values would be implemented in further possible policies will depend on the demand-driven funding pilot. There would be a maximum of two voucher per students, and only students who did not have diplomas in higher education would be eligible. However, the option would be open to extend the voucher system to people who already had higher education degrees. The vouchers would be conditioned to credit bearing programmes approved by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders and could be used for public and private institutions. The fact that public money would be going to private education providers has led to many discussions. For some, it appears to be privatisation of part-time higher education, but Minister Bussemaker of Education, Culture, and Science underlined that this not the case; funding is only distributed differently (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015, 30012.51).

In order to create equality and thus free market competition among both private and public institutions, public institutions would be allowed to provide modular education and would no longer be bound by the *vestigingsplaatsbeginsel*. Just as in Scenario 3, the government expects part-time higher education programmes to be more demand-driven at institutions. With money now following the students, part-time higher education providers would have to compete with one another in order to attract students and their associated tuition fees (Hillman et al., 2014). When students “vote with their feet” (Tweede Kamer, 2014-2015, 30012.51) market forces will be created that incentivized institutions to be more responsive to part-time students’ educational needs (Fischer, 2005). Proponents of this market-based reform expect more favourable access policies for part-time learners. Also, they expect better exploitation of flexible modes of study and overall quality of part-time higher education programmes as providers aim to maintain enrolment in a competitive environment (NRTO, 2014; Rinooy Kan, 2014)

The implementation of demand-driven funding is expected to remove the barrier of lack of financial assistance and other support. Finance remains an important obstacle in part-time students’ decisions to study (Rinooy Kan, 2014). According to Schuetze and Slowey’s (2002) theory, adults are more likely to participate in education if they receive financial support without constraints. Participation in part-time higher education is thus likely to increase with the introduction of vouchers. However, there is a risk that fees for part-time higher education programmes will rise as subsidies for public institutions disappear. At the moment, higher education providers receive approximately 3250 euro per student





per half year. Revenues would decline for institutions when they received 1250 euro per student per half year through vouchers. Therefore, institutions have to look for new sources of income, which may increase fees. A new barrier to participation may arise when fees are too high to be sufficiently covered by vouchers.

Another barrier to participation directly addressed in Scenario 4 is institutional autonomy. The introduction of education vouchers for part-time higher education is not the only measure taken in Scenario 4. In addition, public higher education institutions would be free to determine their fees because the government would no longer decide on the fee level. The ability of part-time higher education providers to establish their own fees would increase the financial autonomy of institutions (EUA, 2011). The abolition of the *vestigingsplaatsbeginsel* and a flexible interpretation of Article 7.13 in the Higher Education and Research Act would also contribute to the growth of academic autonomy of the institutions.

A summary of the barriers to participation in relation to Scenario 4 is given in Table 4. Scenario 4 is similar to Scenario 3 in the government’s assumption that part-time higher education becomes more demand driven. Therefore, all barriers to participation are likely to decrease. Also, institutions would become more academic as well as financially autonomous. The difference between Scenario 4 and Scenario 3 is the implementation of education vouchers for part-time higher education students. Scenario 4 is the only scenario in which students would receive financial support. However, there is a risk that a possible increase in tuition fees would counterbalance the effect of education vouchers.

Table 4: Barriers to participation in part-time higher education in relation to Scenario 4

	Situational barriers			Institutional barriers									
	Distance	Time	Employer support	System differentiation and coordination		Institutional governance		Access		Mode of study			Financial support
				Horizontal diversification	Dead-end routes	Institutional autonomy	No interest	Admission criteria	Recognition prior learning	Time interruptions	Inflexible regarding time/space	Non-individualized curriculums	Government funding
Scenario 4													

-  Barrier is not addressed
-  Barrier is expected to increase
-  Barrier is likely to reduce
-  Barrier is very likely to reduce

Chapter 5

5.1 Discussion of the results

All four scenarios proposed for part-time higher education in the Netherlands have been evaluated according to their expected ability to address barriers to participation. Based on these results, the following research question can be answered:

How successful will each of the four scenarios, proposed by the Dutch government, be in increasing participation rates in part-time higher education?

The results are summarized in a Goeller scorecard, Table 5, that presents the scenarios on one dimension and the barriers to participation on the other. The colours represent the contribution of a scenario to diminishing the barriers to participation in part-time higher education. The two-dimensional display permits a quick view of how all the scenarios fare across the barriers. As mentioned before, an ex-ante evaluation was chosen to assess whether these scenarios are expected to increase participation rates in part-time higher education. Each scenario is evaluated on its expected ability to reduce barriers to participation in part-time higher education. The barriers to participation are

- Situational barriers: distance, time constraints, and employer support.
- Institutional barriers: system differentiation and coordination, institutional governance, access, modes of study, and financial support.

In scenario 1 amendments to current rules and regulations would be made in order to increase the flexibility in part-time higher education. Removal and clarification of legislation would encourage institutions to explore possibilities of providing tailor-made curriculums, online education and education on the work floor. Besides, the distinction made in law between full-time and part-time programmes, creates more opportunities to offer part-time programmes in different sectors. Consequently, scenario 1 has great potential to decrease situational barriers to participation in part-time higher education. Moreover, the institutional barriers 'system differentiation and coordination', 'institutional governance', and 'mode of study' are likely to be reduced as well. Although scenario 1 is expected to reduce the majority of barriers to participation, two barriers are not directly addressed, namely 'access' and 'financial support'. The scenario is not expected to stimulate or create favourable admission criteria, recognition of prior learning, and financial support. Therefore, scenario 1 is not expected to be the most successful in increase the chance of higher participation rates in part-time higher education.

In the second scenario, specific legislation for part-time higher education would be enforced. An independent education system will be introduced for government funded part-time higher education. The three characteristics of this separate system are: coherency and transparency, concentration on recognition of prior learning, and an enhanced interrelatedness with the social partners. All barriers, except financial support, are likely to be addressed as the result of pushing government to demand-driven part-time higher education. However, the barrier 'institutional governance' is likely to increase as government regulations increase. Consequently, the response of higher education institutions to the needs of part-time student is restricted. Due to its comprehensive policy, Scenario 2 is expected to increase the chance of higher participation rate in

part-time higher education, as the majority of barriers are expected to be reduced. Nevertheless, scenario 2 also increase a barrier which makes is not the ideal situation.





In the third scenario, part-time higher education would be privatised, which would mean ending public funding. Market forces are expected to make part-time higher education more responsive to the needs of the students and employers. As a result, all barriers, except 'financial support', to participation are likely to decrease. The barrier 'financial support' is expected to form an even larger obstacle to participation as part-time students would not receive any form of public funding in scenario 3. Based on the result of the evaluation, scenario 3 is expected to increase the chance of higher participation rate in part-time higher education. However, the government and other parties has expressed their concerns on the impact of this scenario on the equality of access and the diversity of part-time programmes as some sectors require large investment.

In the fourth scenario, demand-driven funding by way of vouchers would be introduced. Part-time higher education would be expected to become more demand-driven, as institutions would have to compete for students and thus funding. Consequently, all barriers to participation in part-time higher education are likely to be reduced as education becomes more demand-driven. Scenario 4 directly decrease the barrier 'financial support' as it introduced a new funding formula focussed on part-times students. The scenario is expected to be highly successful since all barriers to participation are 'likely to be reduced' or 'very likely to be reduced'.

It is striking that all scenarios are expected to reduce the majority of barriers. This implies that each scenario is expected to be successful in increasing participation rates. However, based on the ex-ante evaluation of all scenarios, the fourth scenario 'demand-driven funding' is expected to be the most successful in increasing participation rates in accredited part-time higher education programmes. As can be seen in table 5, scenario 4 is the only scenario in which all barriers are 'likely to be reduced' or 'very likely to be reduced'. In addition, no barriers are expected to increase as the result of the policy measures taken in this scenario. Overall, the introduction of demand-driven funding and its corresponding measures is expected to be the most successful in reducing barriers and thus in increasing participation in accredited part-time higher education programmes.

Table 5: Overview ex-ante evaluation of the four scenarios proposed for part-time higher education in the Netherlands.

	Situational Barriers			Institutional Barriers				
	Distance	Time	Employer support	System differentiation and coordination	Institutional governance	Access	Mode of study	Financial support
Scenario 1	Very likely to reduce	Very likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Not addressed	Likely to reduce	Not addressed
Scenario 2	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Very likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Expected to increase	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Not addressed
Scenario 3	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Very likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Expected to increase
Scenario 4	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Very likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Likely to reduce	Very likely to reduce

-  Barrier is not addressed
-  Barrier is expected to increase
-  Barrier is likely to reduce
-  Barrier is very likely to reduce

Scenario 4 will address several issues which have been put forward by the government-funded research mentioned in Chapter 2. The introduction of demand-driven funding result in a new funding formula focussed on part-time higher education students. The missing focus of the current funding formula on part-time students has been stressed by the Commission Veerman (2010). The report *Flexible higher education for adults* presented by the Commissioner Rinnooy Kan (2014) has emphasized the advantages of demand-driven funding. Such a funding formula is expected to stimulate adults to take up part-time learning. In addition, part-time higher education providers are expected to be more demand driven, as they have to compete for students and thus funding. The amendments in legislation and the competition between institutions is expected to lead to an increase of flexible and tailor-made study programmes (Rinooy Kan, 2014). Scenario 4 is thus expected to address the two fundamental problems in part-time higher education: inflexibility in the way study programmes are organised and a lack of options for tailor-made study programmes (ResearchNed, 2012). In this study, a scenario is considered to be successful if it is expected to increase the proportion of part-time students to the EU average. Offering financial support for adults

in participating in higher education is likely to increase participation rates according to Research en Beleid (2010).

As mentioned before, there is a risk that fees for part-time higher education programmes will rise as subsidies for public institutions disappear. A new barrier to participation may arise when fees are too high to be sufficiently covered by educational vouchers. In order to prevent undesirable high fees, the government could set a maximum on tuition fees for part-time higher education programmes. The level of tuition fees could vary for different studies as some studies are more expensive for institutions to provide. Furthermore, the government wants to stimulate students to obtain a degree in part-time higher education. If a part of the voucher is reserved as a degree bonus, students are stimulated to complete their part-time higher education programme. This proposal has been put forward by Rinooy Kan (2014) and may become part of the pilot *Demand-driven funding*. However, stimulation of participation in non-degree part-time higher education is also desirable in a knowledge economy. Nevertheless, financial responsibility of the Dutch government is limited and that is why employers are considered to be responsible for stimulation of non-degree learning (Rinooy Kan, 2014).

Scenario 4 is expected to be the most successful, but conclusions have to be drawn carefully. The conclusion is based on the assumption of giving equal weight to barriers, which implies that the barriers to participation do not differ regarding their importance. This study recognises that this assumption is debatable. In order to give meaningful weight to the barriers, specific research is needed on the barriers to participation in part-time higher education perceived by adults in the Netherlands. Although this information is missing, the study of Research en Beleid (2010) could provide insights. As mentioned before, Research en Beleid has identified four policy-instruments likely to increase participation rates in adult education. These policy-instruments were directed to reduce the following barriers: 'modus of study', 'financial support', and 'employer support'. Another issue that makes it hard to weigh the barriers is the interrelatedness between them. The distinction between different barriers and between different categories of barrier is not always clear due to different interpretations of the specific barriers.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has evaluated the four scenarios for part-time higher education proposed by the Dutch government on their expected ability to reduce barriers to participation. Although each of the four scenarios is likely to reduce the majority of barriers to participation, scenario 4 'demand-driven funding' is expected to be the most successful. Therefore, based on the result of this study, the government is recommended to take a closer look at scenario 4.

Apart from constructing an ex-ante analysis, this study has delivered more detailed information about the content of each scenario. The policy measures in each scenario have been visualized more and up-to-date information has been added to the original proposal of the scenarios on March 30, 2012. Overall, this study makes a substantial contribution to the debate about part-time higher education in the Netherlands, as it provides useful information about the different proposed scenarios and their expected success in increasing participation rates.

This conclusion will end with some suggestions for future research. First of all, this study is mainly focussed on the expected effectiveness of the proposed scenarios. However, also other factors are playing a role in the process of policy making. It will be of great interest to investigate the costs of scenario 4 for the government. With vouchers, funds are directed to part-time students instead of public higher education institution. However, when participation rates increase, the cost for the government may increase as well. The question is whether the budget for part-time higher education needs to grow. Moreover, if the budget for part-time higher education needs to grow, will scenario 4 still be political feasible?

Second, it will interesting to explore the different management strategies for part-time higher education providers in scenario 4. Further research could investigate how institutions should organise and manage part-time higher education, in scenario 4, in order to increase participation rates.

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