

Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs

# **University Autonomy in Twenty Countries**

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

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## Abbreviations

CHEMS Commonwealth (of Nations) Higher Education Management Service

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

CFAT Carnegie Fund for the Advancement of Teaching





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## Executive Summary

This project uses experts' perceptions to describe and compare the salient features of the governance of the higher education systems in a range of countries relevant to Australia's situation. The emphasis is on the relationships between the national government (or, where appropriate, also state and regional governments) and higher education institutions—in particular the extent of government influence on university operations

The countries are analysed in three groups each with a different tradition of university autonomy: an Anglo-American group, which includes Australia; a European group, mostly West European but including Russia; and an Asian group. The study asked two questions: whether governments have legal authority to intervene in a number of aspects of university management, and the extent to which governments actually exercise influence in these aspects, whether legally empowered to intervene or not.

The study proceeded by questionnaire administered to government officials of the target countries and, wherever possible, to individuals within those countries known to be expert on the topic. Reliability was very high, there rarely being any large variations in the answers among respondents from the one country. In the few cases where there were, additional information was sought.

On average, in our sample of 20 countries, it is the Anglo-American group where governments are reported to have less authority to intervene and to be less inclined to exert influence. The European group occupies a middle position ahead of the Asian group. There are exceptions, however, particularly with respect to actual government influence.

Australia is seen by the expert respondents consulted in this survey as belonging to the Anglo-American group where governments have relatively little authority to intervene but in the middle of the range when it comes to actually exerting influence.

The judgements of the experts are not dissimilar to the perceptions of academics, who, in a survey of 12 countries conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) (Glassick 1997), placed Australia second only to Korea, when asked whether 'there is too much government interference in important academic policies'. In that survey Australian academics, compared with others, typically thought that the government should have less responsibility to define academic policies and should interfere less.

Another international study, made by the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) (Richardson & Fielden 1997), examined relations with government by approaching a sample of institutions in Commonwealth countries. Vice-chancellors of Australian universities perceived autonomy to be less than that reported by vice-chancellors in Caribbean countries, but much the same as in United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand.

Within the overall results from the present study there are topics where Australia is notably above the average. These are Students and Governance in the case of authority to intervene; and Students, Governance, and Research and Publication in the case of actually exerting influence.

Nearly all countries reported that their university systems are undergoing reform. Although the direction of change is generally towards greater deregulation and exposure to market competition, respondents are by no means certain that this will result in greater autonomy. Australia has experienced a longer period of reform than most countries, involving as it has fundamental changes to student charges, amalgamations of institutions, quality audits and profile negotiations between institutions and government. In such a context the findings from this survey should not be unexpected.

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## Aim of the Study

This project sets out to describe and compare the salient features of the governance of the higher education systems in a range of countries relevant to Australia's situation. The emphasis is on the relationships between the national government (or, where appropriate, regional governments) and higher education institutions. The project is not targeted at the governance arrangements within institutions except insofar as these are connected with government/institution relations.

The project considers institutional autonomy and the government's role (legal and *de facto*) vis a vis the institutions' in respect of seven main topics:

- staff—appointments, promotions and status of academic and senior general staff;
- students—admissions, progress and discipline;
- curriculum and teaching—methods, examinations, content, text books;
- academic standards—degree standards, quality audits, accreditation;
- research and publication—postgraduate teaching, priorities, freedom to publish;
- governance—councils, academic boards, student associations; and
- administration and finance—funding of institutions; operating grants, capital and equipment grants, one-off tasks, non-government funding, accountability arrangements.



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## Previous Studies

The Commonwealth (of Nations) Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) conducted a study somewhat similar to the present one amongst Commonwealth countries and published its report as a discussion paper in April 1997 (Richardson G.& Fielden J. 1997). This paper 'marks the start of a research activity which the Association of Commonwealth Universities wishes to continue and is thus a first step in a long road of exploration'. The intention was to use the report as a framework for a conference in 1997.

The report (Richardson & Fielden 1997, p. 9) examines the legislation establishing a selection of 22 universities from a cross section of Commonwealth countries. With respect to Australasia it reports that:

the literature suggests that Australia has greater freedom from government control than New Zealand. The legal documentation shows considerable involvement of governments throughout the region in appointing members of council, approving statutes, mission statements and various other matters to a degree that might surprise vice-chancellors from other regions.

It also contains the results of a questionnaire distributed to 70 Commonwealth universities (about 12 per cent of the total) asking for the views of vice-chancellors. The results are reported region by region along a continuum from 'State supervising' (a high degree of institutional autonomy) to 'State control'. On this continuum the Caribbean countries come out as least intrusive, Canada next, then Britain and Australia; New Zealand is slightly more intrusive; then the African countries by a significant margin; then the Asian Commonwealth countries by an equal margin.

With respect to Australasia:

The majority of vice-chancellors reported that government involvement increased over the last five years with controls through members of councils, planning requirements and financial controls. However the questionnaire responses show lower levels of government interference in academic freedom and in institutional autonomy than the Commonwealth as a whole.

(Richardson & Fielden 1997, p. 9)

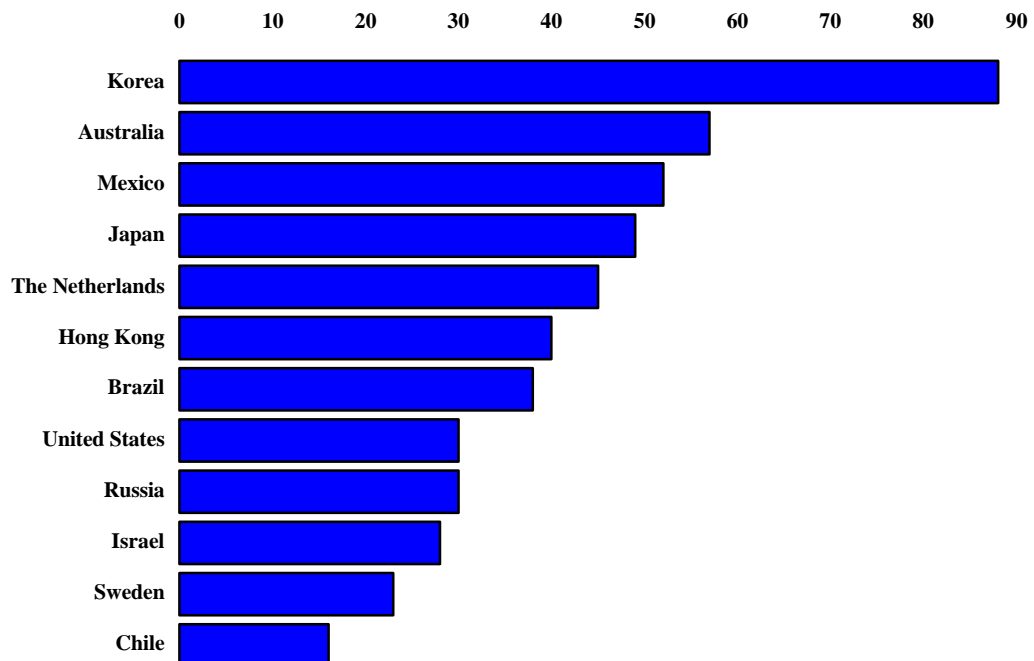
In the open-ended responses to the questionnaire, the majority of the vice-chancellors thought that government involvement had increased over the last five years. Most of the concerns expressed came from the Australian universities.

(Richardson & Fielden 1997, p. 23)

The continuum used in the CHEMS study is drawn from the major publication by Neave and van Vught (1994). The continuum is a ten-point scale; the Caribbean countries come in at about point 1, Canada at 1.2, Britain and Australia at 1.5, New Zealand very close. The Commonwealth average is at 2, Africa at 2.2, Malta and Cyprus at 3 and the Asian Commonwealth countries at 3.2. Thus all Commonwealth countries are relatively free of ‘State control’ as Neave and van Vught (1994) would define it.

The Australian vice-chancellors’ perceptions of government interference mirror the views of Australian academics reported in an international study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) (Glassick 1997). Representative samples of academics were asked whether they agreed with the statement that ‘In this country there is too much governmental interference in important academic policies’. More than half of Australians agreed with the proposition—a higher percentage than in any of the 12 countries apart from Korea. In the United States of America, Russia, Israel, Sweden and Chile less than one third thought that there was too much government interference (see Figure 1).

**In This Country There is Far Too Much Governmental Interference in Important Academic Policies (percentage agreeing)**

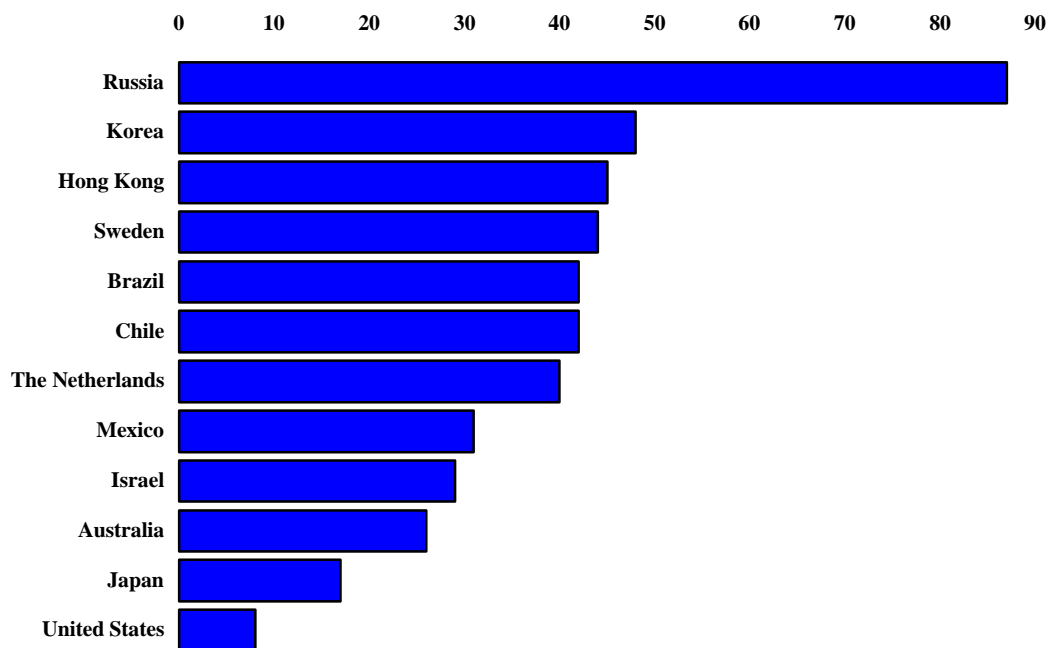


**Figure 1: Academics’ Attitudes to Government Interference**

(Source: Glassick 1997)

Respondents to the CFAT survey were also asked whether ‘The Government should have the responsibility to define the overall purposes and policies for higher education’. In this instance Australia, along with Japan and the United States disagreed most (fewer than 30 per cent agreed); Russia and Korea had the largest proportions asserting that government should have this responsibility (see Figure 2).

**The Government should Have the Responsibility to Define the Overall Purpose and Policies for Higher Education (percentage agreeing)**



**Figure 2: Academics’ Attitudes to Government Responsibility for Policy**

(Source: Glassick 1997)

An interesting typology can be constructed from the two sets of responses by splitting country positions into high and low on both the ‘should have responsibility’ and the factual ‘is far too much governmental interference’ questions.

In the first category is Korea which is relatively high on both questions; that is, government should have the responsibility to define policies and does in fact intervene.

In the second category are Russia and Sweden which are relatively high on the first question but relatively low on the second; that is, government should have responsibility to define policies but does not intervene.

In the third category are Mexico and Australia where academics assert that government should not have authority to define policies, but perceive actual intervention to be high.

The fourth category contains Israel, Japan and the United States of America where academics have a relatively low position on both questions; that is, governments should not have the responsibility to define policies and in fact are perceived to be low on intervention.



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## The Context of University Autonomy

The relation of a government to its universities is not static—a fact mentioned by most of our respondents. In the last decade or so there has been considerable change and turbulence in higher education in many countries. For example, Sweden has just completed far-reaching reforms designed to devolve authority from government to institutions; and the Danish government has been intervening with the objective of reducing the length of courses and time taken to graduate. Italy has recently granted budget autonomy and further legislation is being implemented giving institutions increased scope for taking decisions; and discussions are taking place over ‘who owns the curriculum, government or universities or some intermediate agency’. Germany is amending the federal government’s framework act for higher education which will lead to numerous changes that will have to be implemented by the states (Länder). The United Kingdom is in the middle of implementing the Dearing Committee recommendations, a number of which involve government initiatives. Australia and New Zealand are emerging from long periods of ‘reform’ in which governments have introduced ‘user pays’ and are exposing institutions to competitive market forces.

In New Zealand the coalition government has recently published a Green Paper on future Tertiary Education Policy. It deals with the funding of tuition costs, the funding of research undertaken by tertiary institutions, the regulation of the tertiary sector, and the governance and accountability of tertiary institutions. The paper proposes significant departures from existing policy which is regarded as flawed. If the proposals are implemented there would be a substantial reduction of institutional autonomy. For example, university councils are deemed to be too large, their representative character is reckoned to impair effective decision making and their accountability is weak and diffused. The Green Paper suggests reducing the size of councils and changing their composition so that preferably all, or at least a majority of members are ministerial appointees (Creech 1997).

Overall in OECD countries recent changes are producing convergent tendencies. On the one hand, among Anglo-American systems institutions have traditionally enjoyed considerable institutional autonomy but, in the last decade or so, have been required by their governments to be more accountable. On the other, in European countries where institutions traditionally operated within a framework of detailed legislation, there have been reforms under which central authority has been devolved.

The situation is different again in some Asian countries where many universities are relatively recent creations, and are viewed and used by government, perhaps more explicitly than in the west, as instruments contributing to national cohesion and to plans for economic and social development.

A number of respondents drew our attention to changes occurring in their countries as they received our questionnaire. For example, in Malaysia the government has been concerned with many aspects of university management, but new legislation is intended to deregulate them ‘to become less hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions’. A comment from one of the German respondents in this survey is typical of the intentions of many of these reforms:

Reforming the German higher education system is to facilitate competition and differentiation by means of deregulation, performance orientation and the creation of incentives; it is further intended to ensure the international competitiveness of German higher education institutions for the 21st century.

In the context of such a rapidly changing situation it was often difficult for respondents to report on the current situation in their countries. We encouraged them in answering to reflect the situation as it is now, or as it will be very shortly when reforms are in place.

For the purposes of this exercise university autonomy is defined as the freedom of an institution to run its own affairs without direction or influence from any level of government. Government influence may be based on legislative authority or executive suasion related to financial power. For example a government may exert influence through its legislative authority to appoint the vice-chancellor or members of the governing body; or it may exert influence over such matters as the salaries and conditions of academic staff, not because of any legal authority, but simply because it provides most of the income and can threaten to withhold funding unless its conditions are met. As we will see, government influence by ‘steering from a distance’ using financial authority is very common in the countries we survey. The most direct intervention we found occurs in some Asian countries where appointment and transfer of academic staff must be approved by government, and where government initiates a compulsory citizenship curriculum.

Institutional autonomy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for academic freedom which is the right of academic staff to decide what to teach, to determine their own research questions and methods, and to publish the results of that research. At least one critic of university development regards the recent installation of systems of market competition by governments in many countries as extending regulation and inimical to academic freedom.

Far from being naturally ‘outside’ government, the modern university is a product of government and serves the purposes of government, though it also has other constituencies and purposes. Conventional academic freedom is ... exercised within boundaries controlled by government and management.

(Marginson 1997)

The modern university, for most of its 800 year history has owed allegiance to someone. Universities have always needed patrons and at various times the Church, dukes, merchants or philanthropists among others funded universities and have expected suitable behaviour in response—correct doctrine, political policies,

laissez faire values or charitable support. But universities have also cherished their freedom and at times have actually challenged state power; for example, providing haven to political refugees and even, in the Latin tradition, criminals.

Over the last hundred years or so, and particularly since World War II, governments have become the chief patrons of universities and, in response, have expected them to be useful instruments for the advancement of national purposes.

Universities have wanted to keep the cake and to eat it. They welcomed generous beneficence and, in all industrial countries, encouraged expansion of higher education to dimensions undreamed of even 50 years ago. The price of this support has of course been greater government interest in the internal affairs of universities. By and large, universities have successfully resisted attempts from government to run them the way that public school systems or the public service are conducted, with objectives and efficiency criteria specified by the state and staff employed by it.

But there have been intrusions, the common one across universities in industrial countries being the demands that universities conduct themselves according to government efficiency criteria and that they submit to quality audits. Although the cause for some irritation, these particular requirements have not been regarded as violating university autonomy in fundamental academic matters; namely, the right of institutions to appoint their own staff, and the right of staff to teach and to research according to the dictates of their own intelligences and academic disciplines, and the freedom to publish the results of their scholarly work without reference to any other authority.

In footing the bill for public universities governments have asserted their right to stipulate how many students a university may enrol, and sometimes even what sorts of students (the Australian government's equity categories come to mind) but not what intellectual tests should be used, let alone which particular individual students should be enrolled. Governments have also occasionally used their financial influence to introduce or reduce some broad fields of study—another veterinary or medical school or a reduction in the numbers studying teacher education. But such influence has been at the macro level and there are very few, if any examples, in Anglo-American and European systems at least, of government attempting to influence the content of curriculum. The same may be said of research. Governments influence broad priorities—with carrots rather than sticks—but not the priorities of an institution, let alone an individual academic's research topics.

In the turbulent decade since the Dawkins 1988 White Paper, Australian academics have come to believe that there is undue government intervention in their affairs. Government has decreed which institutions can be universities, has forced amalgamations between formerly autonomous institutions, has denied salary increases to academic staff, has required students to pay one quarter or more of the cost of tuition, has attempted to change the size and composition of university councils, and has attempted to impose a view of efficiency on university management and has pressured university management to reduce entitlements of academic staff to tenure. Government policies have led to an unfortunate state of affairs dividing academic staff and university administrators into opposing camps over pay and conditions of employment.

Whether all of this amounts to an undue undermining of autonomy or intrusion into academic freedom is a matter for debate. A majority of Australian academic staff certainly regard government interference as excessive—coming second only to Korea and twice the rate of Sweden—in an international poll which asked about government interference in important academic matters.

For the purposes of the exercise ‘government’ was defined inclusively as including ministries and the bureaucracy and, in federal systems, government at any level. One of our United States respondents pointed out that in his state university system, institutions have four levels of government to relate to: federal, state, local and statutory—the last being the Board of Regents which, he reported, was an instrument of government. He also distinguished between government influence via legislation, executive action, and judicial decision. (Despite all of the above this respondent, like others from the United States, reported relatively high autonomy for their universities!)

Whereas to the layman the phrase ‘legal authority to intervene’ may seem unambiguous, to the expert, including some of our respondents, its meaning is subject to all sorts of interpretations. For example, in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, one of the Australian respondents commented on the political implications of legal authority of governments, stating that

... if the Commonwealth Government wants to do anything badly enough it could *in principle* tie the desired practice as change to continued funding under the Higher Education Funding Act. Indeed, the power of the Commonwealth is probably almost unfettered, as long as the matter can be related to funding. Since sensitivities are very great, this is a risky course for any government. But your questions only talk of ‘legal authority’. Though I’ve written ‘no’ the answer could be ‘yes’ in every case. The Commonwealth has no constitutional authority, of course, to do anything in the field except student scholarships.

(sec 51 xxiii a, agreed 1946)

In similar vein another Australian respondent observed that enabling legislation in effect prescribes much of a university’s operations—for example, practically all of

question 1 could be answered 'yes', but, on a day to day basis, universities operate with a great degree of autonomy. 'The principle is one of 'set and forget'; that is, set the legislative framework and forget about intervening unless forced to.'

With respect to 'exertion of influence' it would have been helpful to have an assessment of the importance and intensity and its frequency. In an early version of the questionnaire we asked for a rating of 'importance' well as 'frequency'. The former was dropped because it made the questionnaire too complicated. The issue remains, however; for example, in the Netherlands, as one of our respondents pointed out, there is not a single executive officer like the vice-chancellor, but there is a collegium of three persons being the Chief Executive Board (of which the Rector is a member). The Rector is appointed by the minister (university council has the right to nominate). 'So, with regard to "exertion of influence" we scored "often" but it should be "always"'.

Finally, it should be noted that government is not the only agency which may exert leverage over universities. In the central area of curriculum the professions are far more interventionist, insisting that the content of a course meets their approval, or else they will use their control over the right to practise to refuse admission to graduates.



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## Some Methodological Issues

The questionnaire used in the present study distinguishes between legal power and actual influence irrespective of legal power by asking, first, whether government has the legal power to intervene, and, second, whether the government in fact does exert significant influence.

There are seven main topics in the survey and, within these, a total of 50 issues in the form of questions. Some of these concern institutional autonomy but not academic freedom, others touch both autonomy and freedom. For example, the topic of 'Administration and Finance' includes issues which could threaten autonomy but not academic freedom as we have defined them; for example government influence over student numbers, closure or amalgamation of institutions, length of courses, financial audit and financial aid to students. On the other hand, the topics of 'Curriculum and Teaching', 'Staff' and 'Research and Publication' include issues close to the heart of academic freedom such as selection of text books, methods of examination, appointment and dismissal of academic staff, research priorities, and approval of publications.

In between the above extremes are topics where the question of academic freedom is sometimes regarded as an issue. These topics are: 'Students' (e.g. entry standards, pass rates and discipline), 'Academic Standards' (e.g. entry standards of students, quality audits), and 'Governance' (e.g. membership of governing councils or and control of academic boards or student associations). A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

Our 'sampling' base is different from that used in the two surveys of autonomy cited above, in that we have not sampled institutions or academic staff. The brief for the project asked for an objective assessment of university autonomy, to the extent that objectivity is possible, with regard to those functions where institutions are free of government intervention or influence, and those where the government could or does intervene. For this purpose we sought out respondents with expert knowledge of the government-institution relations, and preferably with international experience. We do not pretend that all experts would agree on all of the issues, or indeed that our statement of issues is unambiguous or independent of circumstances that may be interpreted differently by different respondents.

In order to achieve some sort of common understanding we discussed the issues with respondents wherever this was possible, and encouraged them to discuss our questions with colleagues before responding. In almost all of the 20 countries the

responses we use in the analysis are either the outcome of a discussion or the average responses from several respondents. (Reliability was very high, there rarely being any large variations in the answers among respondents from the one country. In the few cases where there were, additional information was sought.)

The 20 countries included in this analysis have classified into three categories—an Anglo-American group, a European group and an Asian group. The basis for this classification is the historical differences in the development of university systems which are reflected in the continuum according to the extent of state control devised by Neave and van Vught (1994) and used in the CHEMS study. The Anglo-American group includes countries which, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, developed a strong tradition of distancing universities from intervention by the state. The European group includes countries where universities came to be established under legislation giving governments considerable potential authority with respect to university administration. The Asian group includes countries where economic development is historically more recent, and where governments have tended to regard universities fairly explicitly as instruments for advancing national cohesion and economic advancement.

The 20 countries in the present study grouped according to this classification are:

<b>Anglo-American Group</b>	<b>European Group</b>	<b>Asian Group</b>
Australia	France	China
Canada	Germany	Malaysia
Ireland	Italy	Japan
South Africa	Netherlands	Indonesia
New Zealand	Russia	Singapore
United Kingdom	Sweden	Sri Lanka
United States		Thailand



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## Results

### Overall Rating of Satisfaction

After considering the 50 issues respondents were asked at the end of the questionnaire to evaluate autonomy by responding to the statement:

Given the mission of universities in your country do you think that government intervention is: (1) Excessive in the extreme; (2) Somewhat excessive; (3) Slightly excessive; (4) Not unreasonable; (5) Insufficient?

This question of course asks for a subjective judgement; nevertheless, there was considerable similarity in the answers given within countries and, to a fair extent, between countries. The modal response of 'not unreasonable' was given by 80 per cent of respondents. No-one answered at either extreme that government intervention was 'excessive in the extreme' or that it was 'insufficient'. Countries where at least one respondent thought that intervention was at least slightly excessive were France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Japan and Sri Lanka.

Given that many of our respondents have an active role at system level it is perhaps not surprising that most think that the present situation is not unreasonable. Had we asked practising academics the replies may well have been very different.

### Government has Legal Authority to Intervene

#### Topics

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the government in their country had legal authority to intervene by responding 'Yes' or 'No' to each of the 50 issues covered in the seven topics of the survey.

The column totals of Table 1 show the number of 'yes' responses given by all countries to issues within each topic; for example, a total of 61 'yes' responses were given to the five issues in the Staff topic and 162 'yes' responses were given to the 13 topics in the Administration and Finance topic. Comparisons between topics may be made more readily by expressing these totals as a per cent of the maximum possible for each topic. This has been done in the bottom row of the table.

**Table 1: Government has Legal Authority to Intervene: Average Numbers of ‘Yes’ Responses for each Country within each Main Topic**

	Staff	Stud	C&T	AC St	RAP	Gov	A&F	Total	% #
<i>Number of Items</i>	9	5	7	6	5	5	13		
Australia	1	2	0	1	1	3	8	<b>16</b>	32
Canada	0	0	1	0	2	1	4	<b>8</b>	16
Chile	2	2	2	5	3	2	7	<b>23</b>	46
France	7	3	4	5	4	4	12	<b>39</b>	78
Germany	4	1	2	3	0	2	7	<b>19</b>	38
Indonesia	9	4	3	4	3	5	11	<b>39</b>	78
Ireland	0	0	1	4	1	1	6	<b>13</b>	26
Italy	1	3	2	4	0	0	6	<b>16</b>	32
Japan	5	2	0	2	1	1	11	<b>22</b>	44
Malaysia	4	3	2	4	5	4	11	<b>33</b>	66
Netherlands	4	2	0	2	2	1	10	<b>21</b>	42
New Zealand	1	2	2	4	1	2	8	<b>20</b>	40
Russia	0	0	2	5	2	0	9	<b>18</b>	36
Singapore	1	0	3	0	1	2	10	<b>17</b>	34
South Africa	1	2	3	4	1	1	4	<b>16</b>	32
Sri Lanka	4	4	2	3	1	3	10	<b>27</b>	54
Sweden	2	3	0	4	2	1	6	<b>18</b>	36
Thailand	4	3	1	3	1	1	10	<b>23</b>	46
United Kingdom	1	0	0	2	1	0	7	<b>11</b>	22
United States	1	1	1	2	1	2	7	<b>15</b>	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>162</b>		
%*	29	37	22	51	33	36	63		

# ‘yes’ responses for each country as a per cent of the maximum possible of 50

\* ‘yes’ responses for each topic as a per cent of the maximum possible for that topic

Stud= Students; C&T= Curriculum and Teaching; AC-St= Academic Standards; RAP= Research and Publications; Gov= Governance; A&F= Administration and Finance

Not unexpectedly the two topics where governments are seen to have most authority are Academic Standards and Administration and Finance. Overall more than half of responses to the issues we listed within these two topics received a positive response, that is our respondents said that their governments did have legal authority to intervene.

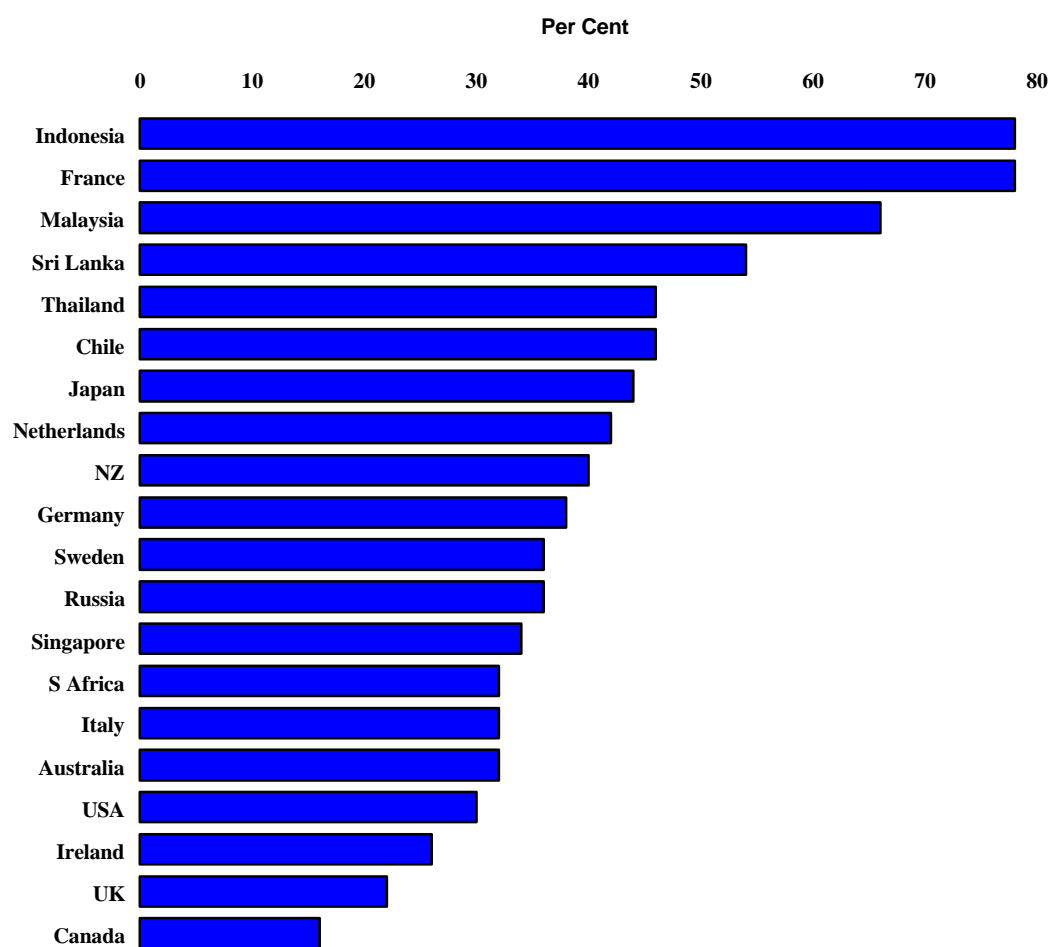
Topics where governments are reported to have least authority are Curriculum and teaching (22 per cent positive responses overall) and Governance (36 per cent positive responses overall).

### **Countries**

The survey reveals a very wide range in the extent to which governments have legal authority to intervene—from under 20 per cent to more than three quarters of the issues that were presented. The rank order of countries on ‘legal authority to intervene’, from low to high is:

Canada  
United Kingdom  
Ireland  
United States  
Australia  
Italy  
South Africa  
Singapore  
Russia  
Sweden  
Germany  
New Zealand  
Netherlands  
Japan  
China  
Thailand  
Sri Lanka  
Malaysia  
France  
Indonesia

This order corresponds fairly closely with the three country groupings referred to in Chapter 4 and with Neave and van Vught’s (1994) continuum.



**Figure 3: Averages of Experts' Ratings of Government Authority to Intervene**

(Source: Table 1)

The countries which appear to be out of their country groups in this classification are Singapore which is on the border of the Anglo-American and European groups, New Zealand which is in the middle with the European group, and France which is located with the Asian group of countries.

Governance is the one topic where Australia is above the average with respect to legal authority of government to intervene.

### **Government does Exert Significant Influence**

The second main question asked respondents to rate each of the 50 issues with respect to the extent that government does exert significant influence. Ratings could be 'Never' = 0; 'Only rarely' = 1; 'From time to time' = 2; and 'Often' = 3.

These ratings are summed for each country for each of the seven topics and expressed as a percentage of the total possible score (all 3s) for that topic. For

example on the Staff topic there are 9 issues, so the range of possible scores is 0 to 27. The Australian respondents' ratings for the total of the nine issues averaged 4.4 which is 16 per cent of 27. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Government Does Exert Significant Influence: Sum of Ratings as a Per cent of Total Possible Rating for each Topic by Country**

	Staff	Stud	C&T	Stand	R&Pu	Gov	A&F	Tot*	%
Australia	16	45	20	34	40	37	52	<b>244</b>	35
Canada	16	20	20	10	25	20	38	<b>149</b>	21
Chile	37	53	33	83	60	27	62	<b>355</b>	51
France	41	30	35	60	51	20	62	<b>299</b>	43
Germany	37	35	20	18	20	16	42	<b>188</b>	27
Indonesia	45	50	40	50	33	48	77	<b>343</b>	49
Ireland	12	7	10	18	33	34	35	<b>149</b>	21
Italy	15	47	14	44	33	35	72	<b>260</b>	37
Japan	19	20	33	18	20	14	65	<b>189</b>	27
Malaysia	52	20	14	28	67	33	50	<b>264</b>	38
Netherlands	19	40	29	28	20	20	69	<b>225</b>	32
New Zealand	15	40	20	49	20	13	46	<b>203</b>	29
Russia	7	27	38	64	33	38	51	<b>258</b>	37
Singapore	32	67	38	100	40	39	59	<b>375</b>	54
South Africa	7	36	34	72	47	37	36	<b>269</b>	38
Sri Lanka	37	59	23	39	25	37	51	<b>271</b>	38
Sweden	7	47	10	61	33	25	54	<b>237</b>	34
Thailand	33	45	10	50	12	17	37	<b>204</b>	29
United Kingdom	15	5	18	13	7	13	33	<b>104</b>	15
United States	30	17	11	27	15	51	36	<b>187</b>	27
	<b>492</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>1027</b>		
%#	25	36	24	43	31	29	50		

The ratings for each issue were scored: never = 0, only rarely = 1, from time to time = 2, often = 3.

The scores for the issues within each topic were summed. These were averaged for each country and expressed as % of total possible for each topic.

\* The row totals therefore give equal weight to each topic.

# The column per cents are the average of the per cent score on each topic for all countries

Not unexpectedly the topic of Administration and Finance scores highest with an average rating of 50 per cent of the maximum possible. Next is Academic Standards with an average rating of 43 per cent of the maximum possible.

Issues within the Academic Standards topic which frequently received a positive response included quality audits, accreditation of institutions and accreditation of courses. Issues within the Administration and Finance topic which frequently received a positive response included student numbers, closure or amalgamation of institutions, financial audit, level of tuition fees and financial aid to students.

Topics with the lowest average ratings are Governance (29 per cent) and Staff (25 per cent). Within these topics issues least likely to get a high rating included appointment and dismissal of staff and membership or control of academic boards.

Topics which received intermediate average ratings are students, research and publication, and curriculum and teaching. Issues with higher ratings within this intermediate group included entry standards and quotas for minorities, research priorities, and, within Asian countries, language of instruction.

Generally there is a positive correlation between ‘legal authority to intervene’ and ‘exertion of significant influence’ (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Rank Order of the Survey Topics on ‘Government has Legal Authority to Intervene’ and ‘Government does Exert Significant Influence’**

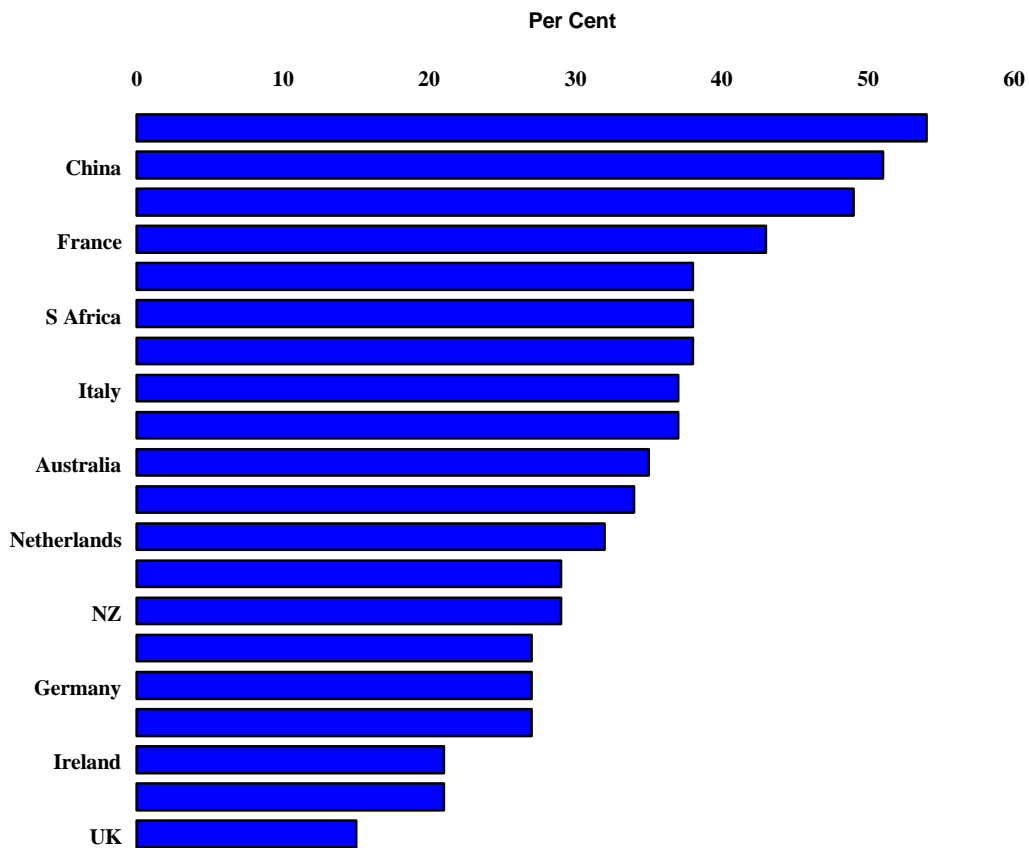
Rank Order on ‘Legal Authority’	Name of Topic	Rank Order on ‘Exerts Influence’
1 high	Administration and Finance	1
2	Academic Standards	2
3	Students	3
4	Research and Publication	4
5	Staff	7
6	Governance	5
7 low	Curriculum and Teaching	6

## Countries

When it comes to the influence that governments actually exert the correlation with university tradition—Anglo-American, European, Asian—is not quite as strong as we found with authority to intervene. In Table 4 countries have been listed in rank order according to the overall per cent of the ratings for ‘exerts influence’. For comparison the rank order of each country on authority to intervene is also included in the table.

**Table 4: Country Score and Rank Order on ‘Exerts Influence’ and Rank on ‘Authority to Intervene’**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Total Score on ‘Exerts Influence’ %</b>	<b>Rank on ‘Exerts Influence’</b>	<b>Rank on ‘Authority to Intervene’</b>
United Kingdom	15	1	2
Canada	21	2/3	1
Ireland	21	2/3	3
United States of America	27	4	4
Germany	27	5	10
Japan	27	6	14
New Zealand	29	7	11/12
Thailand	29	8	15/16
Netherlands	32	9	13
Sweden	34	10	8/9
Australia	35	11	11/12
Russia	37	12	8/9
Italy	37	13	5/6
Malaysia	38	14	18
South Africa	38	15	5/6
Sri Lanka	38	16	17
France	43	17	19/20
Indonesia	49	18	19/20
China	51	19	15/16
Singapore	54	20	7



**Figure 4: Average of Experts' Ratings of Government Actually Exerting Influence**

(Source: Table 4)

As can be seen in Figure 4 there is a very large difference between the three or four countries at each end of the range, but not a great deal of variation in the middle. For convenience, however, in discussing the results we have again placed the 20 countries in approximately equal groups (6, 7 and 7) corresponding to relatively low, medium and high levels of government influence.

**The low influence group** includes countries which scored from 15 per cent to 27 per cent on our scale of government influence. It comprises most of the countries listed in the Anglo-American group (see Table 4).

Comments made by respondents from the United Kingdom indicate that their country's top position on autonomy could change when their new government responds to the recently completed national committee of inquiry into higher



education. For example, one respondent expects greater influence than has previously been the case:

The Government's control over the level of tuition fees (now) applies only where those tuition fees are met from public funds. As part of the reforms following the Dearing report, the new government has talked about the possibility of legislating to control individual institution's powers to levy supplementary variable fees from students on top of the standard, national fees.

Also in United Kingdom the government has no power to intervene in standards (except for teacher education) but the national committee of inquiry into higher education has recommended that it be a condition of public funding of universities that they adhere to an approved code of practice of quality assurance in this area.

A Canadian respondent also made the point that influence is exercised indirectly through the power of the purse. While indicating a generally low level of influence he reported that both federal and provincial governments have indirectly used strategic grants and targeted funding in relation to research priorities and student matters.

**The medium influence group** includes countries with a score from 29 per cent to 37 per cent on the scale. It comprises four countries listed in the European group—Netherlands, Sweden, Russia and Italy—plus Australia, New Zealand and Thailand.

Australia scored above average on the topics of 'governance', 'research and publication' and 'students'. In the case of governance, items which were given high ratings by respondents on the scale of government influence included membership of governing councils, and control of student associations. Under the heading of research and publication high average ratings were given to whether a university may teach at postgraduate research level, research priorities and particular research topics. Australia scored below average on the topics of 'staff' and 'curriculum and teaching'.

A Netherlands respondent gave examples of how government steers from a distance. With respect to research priorities '... universities are free to decide on the kind of research. On the other hand the government does provide the financial incentives to steer research'. And, with respect to student progress: 'There are no official pass and failure rates (or powers for the) discipline of students, but this issue is connected to student financial aid. Bad performance has financial consequences.' In Sweden also the government formula for its base funding to universities rewards good academic progress of students.

**The high influence group** includes countries in the score range from 38 per cent to 54 per cent. It comprises five of the countries listed in the Asian group—Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China and Singapore—plus South Africa and France. A number of respondents from Asian countries referred to their

governments' policies to ensure that their universities contributed to plans for economic growth. A South African respondent also explained the high interventionist stance of his government in terms of national objectives: '... the new Act on higher education gives much more power to the minister. The general expectation is that these powers will be used in an interventionist way to achieve the goals of transformation.'

In addition to strategic use of universities by governments, there is a tradition in some countries of regarding universities as part of the public service bureaucracy. A Sri Lankan respondent stated that vice-chancellors are regarded by government as public servants. He illustrated the point with an instance of a group of vice-chancellors being ordered home from an overseas study tour because of student unrest.

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## Summary

On average, in our sample of 20 countries, it is the Anglo-American group where governments are reported to have less authority to intervene and to be less inclined to exert influence. The European group occupies a middle position ahead of the Asian group. There are exceptions however, particularly with respect to actual government influence.

Australia is seen by the expert respondents consulted in this survey as one of the countries where government has relatively less authority to intervene, but is in the middle of the range when it comes to the government actually exerting influence.

The judgements of the experts are not dissimilar to the perceptions of academics, who, in the CFAT international survey of 11 countries, placed Australia second only to Korea, when asked whether there is too much government interference in important academic policies. In that survey Australian academics, compared with others, typically thought that the government should have less responsibility to define academic policies and should interfere less.

Another international study conducted by CHEMS examined relations with government by approaching a sample of institutions in Commonwealth countries. It found autonomy in Australia to be less than in Caribbean countries, but much the same as in United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand.

Within the overall results from the present study there are topics where Australia is above the average. These are Governance in the case of authority to intervene; and Governance, Research and Publication, and Students in the case of actually exerting influence. It is about average on Administration and Finance and below average on Staff, Curriculum and Teaching, Academic Standards.

Despite reporting that their government has relatively little legal authority to intervene in university affairs some of the comments from Australian respondents to the open-ended questions indicated a belief that authority should be even less than it is. This is consistent with the findings from the CFAT survey of academics in which, relative to other countries, Australians asserted that government should not have authority to define policies, but, like the respondents to the present survey, perceived actual intervention to be high.

Nearly all countries reported that their university systems are undergoing reform. Although the direction of change is generally towards greater deregulation and exposure to market competition, respondents are by no means certain that this will result in greater autonomy. Australia has experienced a longer period of reform than most countries, involving as it has fundamental changes to student charges, amalgamations of institutions, quality audits and profile negotiations between institutions and government. In such a context the findings from this survey should not be unexpected.



## Appendix: The Autonomy of Government Funded Universities—A Survey

Please respond by indicating the details of university autonomy in your country; that is, for each statement, 1) whether government has legal authority to intervene and, 2) the extent of influence in practice. Government includes ministries and the bureaucracy and, in federal systems, government at any level. University refers to degree awarding institutions with courses of three years duration minimum.

<b>STAFF</b>	<b>1 Government has legal</b>	<b>2 Government does exert significant influence</b>			
	Please write Y=yes ?=unclear N=no	Never	Only rarely	From time to time	Often
Appointment of Chief Executive VC/President/Rector					
Dismissal of Chief Executive					
Appointment of professors					
Dismissal of professors					
Appointment of other academic staff					
Termination or discipline of academic staff					
Academic tenure					
Appointment or dismissal general staff					
Academic pay and conditions					

### **STUDENTS**

Entry standards					
Methods for selection and admission of students					
Quotas for minority groups					
Pass and failure rates					
Discipline of students					

### **CURRICULUM AND TEACHING**

Methods of teaching					
Methods of examination					
Language of instruction					
Introduction of new teaching fields					
Termination of teaching fields					



University budget					
Approval of commercial or money making ventures					
Approval of major capital expenditure					
Level of tuition fees					
Financial aid to students					

**OVERALL**

Given the mission of universities in your country do you think that government intervention is:	Excessive in the extreme	Somewhat excessive	Slightly excessive	Not unreasonable	Insufficient
Place tick $\checkmark$ in appropriate column:					

**OTHER COMMENTS:**


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Thank you for your assistance.

The information provided is confidential and will be published in aggregated form only. We would, however, like to have your name and address so that we may contact you if there are any queries and send you a copy of the report.

Name and Position:

Phone:

Address:

Fax:

Email:

Please return the completed questionnaire, preferably by fax or email, to

Don Anderson

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CCE, Australian National University

fax 61 6 249 4959

ACT 0200

email don.anderson@anu.edu.au

AUSTRALIA





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