

## DECISION MAKING IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

An important factor in educational policy is the division of responsibilities among national, regional and local authorities, as well as schools. Placing more decision-making authority at lower levels of the educational system has been a key aim in educational restructuring and systemic reform in many countries since the early 1980s. Yet, simultaneously, there have been frequent examples of strengthening the influence of central authorities in some areas. For example, a freeing of “process” and financial regulations may be accompanied by an increase in the control of output from the centre and by national curriculum frameworks.

There are many motives for changes in patterns of centralisation, and they vary from country to country. The most common goals are increased efficiency and improved financial control, reduction of bureaucracy, increased responsiveness to local communities, creative management of human resources, improved potential for innovation and

creation of conditions that provide more incentives for improving the quality of schooling. Among the more controversial policy-related themes are a heightened interest in measures of accountability and equity. These last two issues sometimes provide the background for measures that are more “centralised”, such as national assessment programmes and centrally established frameworks.

Various motives are attributed to the desire to increase the autonomy of schools, such as enhancing the quality, effectiveness and responsiveness of schooling. As far as equity is concerned, increased autonomy is more controversial. School autonomy is believed to foster responsiveness to local requirements but is also sometimes seen as involving mechanisms for choice that favour already advantaged groups in society. Setting a centrally determined framework system in which individual schools make decisions is a possible counterbalance against complete school autonomy.

The OECD has collected data on decision making at the lower secondary level of education (see Table). Overall, decisions are most highly centralised

(taken at the central and/or state level of government) in Australia, Austria, Greece, Luxembourg, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, with central government particularly dominant in Greece and Turkey. Decisions are more often taken at the school level in the Czech Republic, England, Hungary, New Zealand and the Slovak Republic and in particular in the Netherlands, where all decisions are taken at the school level.

Decisions on the organisation of instruction are predominantly taken by schools in all OECD countries, while decisions on planning and structures are mostly the domain of more centralised tiers of government. The picture is more mixed for decisions on personnel management and allocation and use of resources. Just less than half of decisions made by

**Percentage of decisions relating to public sector, lower secondary education, taken at each level of government (2003)**

	Central	State	Provincial/ regional	Sub- regional	Local	School	Total
Australia		76				24	100
Austria	27	22			23	29	100
Belgium (Fr.) <sup>a)</sup>		32	25			43	100
Czech Republic	7		1		32	60	100
Denmark	19				38	44	100
England	11				4	85	100
Finland	2				71	27	100
France	24		10	35		31	100
Germany	4	30	17		17	32	100
Greece	80		4		3	13	100
Hungary	4				29	68	100
Italy	23		16		15	46	100
Japan	13		21		44	23	100
Korea	9		34		8	48	100
Mexico	30	45	2			22	100
Netherlands						100	100
New Zealand	25					75	100
Norway	32					37	100
Portugal	50		8		32	41	100
Slovak Republic	33		2		15	50	100
Spain		57	15			28	100
Sweden	18				36	47	100
Turkey <sup>b)</sup>	49		27			24	100

Note: Blanks indicate that the level of government does not have primary responsibility for decisions.

<sup>a)</sup> For Belgium (French speaking community), the level “provincial/regional” means: state level for 61% of the schools, provincial level for 21% and local level for 18% (adding up to 100% which corresponds to 25 in the Table). –

<sup>b)</sup> Data refer to primary education.

Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2004, p. 432.

schools are taken in full autonomy, about the same proportion as those taken within a framework set by a higher authority. Decisions taken by schools in consultation with others are relatively rare. Schools are less likely to make autonomous decisions related to planning and structures than related to other domains.

Between 1998 and 2003, decision making in most countries became more decentralised, most notably in the Czech Republic, Korea and Turkey. The opposite trend was evident in the French community of Belgium and in Greece.

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### **Reference**

OECD, *Education at a Glance 2004*, Paris 2004.