

# DEVELOPMENTS IN SCHOOL CHOICE: LOCAL CASE STUDIES IN AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON BETWEEN SCOTLAND AND THE NETHERLANDS

CHRISTINE TEELKEN

---

## ABSTRACT

Comparative case studies in the Netherlands and Scotland indicate that although formal education policies support school choice, in local situations choice is not encouraged. In order to explain this gap several differences between formal education policy and the actual functioning of education will be distinguished. This provides a more detailed view and a more realistic picture of local choice on a day-to-day basis. This study found that the limited availability of information, the bureaucratic choice procedures, the strictly enforced admission criteria and the lack of educational diversity between schools, all result in actual discouragement of choice.

## INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to bridge the gap between the wider theoretical picture of international educational restructuring and the empirical details of individual schools within their own local choice situation. It provides insight into differences between the national policy framework and the actual choice situation as experienced by schools and students. This is in line with Ball, *et al.* (1992) who considers the dynamics of choice as local and related to specific conditions, possibilities and histories.

Educational systems of different European countries and the US show a tendency towards restructured and deregulated state schooling, often related to enhanced parental choice (Teelken, 1998, 1999). In general, this refers to making public services more like the private sector. Some choice advocates (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Glenn, 1989) argued that choice and the 'quasi' market bring great benefit, especially for disadvantaged students. In the evaluation of these enthusiastic claims, Whitty, *et al.* (1998) speak of global developments involving privatisation and marketisation of public services. On the other hand, critics suggest that such reforms increase the inequality between schools. Tooley (1997) provides us with an overview of the different opinions on whether choice leads to inequalities and reinforces social division (e.g., Ball, 1993; Edwards and Whitty, 1992; Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1993a, b, 1995; Ranson, 1993; Walford, 1994; Woods, 1992) or whether we should see choice as a way to improve educational opportunities (e.g., Holmes, DeSimone and Rupp, 2003; Blank, Levine and Steel, 1996). Whitty and Power (1997) review the whole package of reforms introduced by the British government and are concerned about increased inequality in education provision resulting from the commitment to market forces (see also Bagley, 1996; Tomlinson, 1997; Gillborn, 1997; Gorard, Taylor and Fitz, 2002).

The public debate on the desirability, fairness and consequences of choice has been extensive and has received new impetus with the publication of, for example, policy studies by the Dutch Education Council (Van Dyck, 2001) requested by the Liberal Party Secretary of State for Education in the Netherlands. Gradually more emphasis has been focussed upon the actual consequences of choice. In Britain, social inclusion and exclusion, especially in relation to schools, are major issues for the New Labour government (Whitty, 1998, 2001).

Generally, internationally, there is a tendency towards more choice options for

different schools alongside an increased presence of the market mechanism. The choice situation in the United States is the example most commonly referred to, not least because it contains a great diversity of choice initiatives, on the supply as well as the demand side of educational markets. Whether increased choice leads to more desegregation remains unclear. Examples of choice in other countries can be found in New Zealand, Germany, Finland and England. In New Zealand students do not have the right of automatic admission to a certain school: schools may select their prospective students, although they are not allowed to discriminate (Waslander, 1999). In Germany parents obtained more freedom of choice between the different school types (Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium), which increased the popularity of the most academic school type (Gymnasium) and the fear of increased inequalities between schools (Weiss and Steinert, 1996). Finnish students now have more choice options, especially in cities, which has led to an increased polarisation between schools. The stream of students can be seen as a one-way traffic from less popular to more popular schools (Hirvenoja, 2000). The English study of Parsons, *et al.* (2000) investigated at a local level the role of the traditional school catchment areas. They used a Geographic Information System to determine the extent to which choice is undermining these areas and the nature and scale of students crossing the catchment boundaries. This provides empirical evidence that in the period 1991 to 1996 the percentage of students moving to a school other than their originally designated school increased by up to about 39 percent. It is hardly surprising that in the socially deprived areas more students exercised their right to choose than in the middle class and rural areas.

#### SCHOOL CHOICE: ROTTERDAM VERSUS DUNDEE

The school choice situation in Rotterdam is an example of how school choice operates in general in the Netherlands. There is freedom of school choice, no catchment areas and a wide diversity of secondary schools. Public and denominational schools receive equivalent central funding, a principle that has been traditionally central to the Dutch education system (Karsten & Teelken, 1996). All schools are allowed to request a reasonable, voluntary parental contribution for extra activities. Rotterdam is the largest industrial city in the Netherlands (600,000 inhabitants), with a high percentage of ethnic minorities. Schools of all Dutch denominations are present here. At the time of the research, there were 14 secondary schools providing *mavo-havo-vwo* education<sup>1</sup>, consisting of 6 public schools and 8 denominational schools (1 Catholic, 4 Protestant and 3 Calvinist-Protestant).

Rotterdam's local authority, which functions as a school board for public schools, used to have a strong central governing role with regard to schools. Schools had to conform to both central and local legislation in terms of their organizational structure and educational provision. In order to improve and renew the quality of education, public education in Rotterdam was given a new impetus when the ultimate responsibility for schools was given to school management. One of the issues was how to improve the transfer from primary to secondary education. This initiative was linked to central government policies to improve education, but its 'businesslike' viewpoint was unique. '*Schools for secondary education are medium-sized companies with consumers, who expect a high quality product*'. This suggested a shift from the collective idea of public education towards the view that every school is unique. Attention was given to the organizational structure and the educational approach as marketing concepts because '*adjustment of education to consumers' wishes can improve educational quality*'. Denominational schools (publicly funded, privately managed) in Rotterdam were not given as much encouragement to raise their profiles as the public schools. However, both public and denominational schools experienced similar policy initiatives from central government including a move towards more financial and administrative autonomy.

In Scotland, although choice legislation has increased opportunities for parental choice, this legislation has not been met with any great enthusiasm. As the Parents' Charter in Scotland (SOED, 1995) states: 'your *rights for your child are a choice of school within certain limits*'. Approximately 13 percent of the students transferring from primary to secondary school do this by means of a placing request<sup>2</sup> which means that they want to attend a different school from the one they are assigned to. Adler (1997) indicates that the proportion of all placing requests that are granted has been gradually decreasing from 92.2% in 1984/5 to 86.9% in 1994 and even further to 84.8% in 2001/2 (SOED, 2002). For the entrance to (the first year of) secondary school in 1990/91, 8,867 placing requests were received and 87.5% of them were granted (including those granted by the appeal committee and the sheriff). This percentage had fallen to 76.2% (n=11,051) by 2001/2. Ninety percent of the refusals for placing requests are based on accommodation constraints (SOED, 2002).

The school choice situation in Dundee is not substantially different from any other city in Scotland. Dundee is the fourth city of Scotland (145,000 inhabitants) situated on the east coast. In the actual Dundee area there are 13 comprehensive public secondary schools altogether, providing for the age range 12–18. Three of the schools are Roman Catholic. Two types of catchment areas are operated: one for the non-denominational schools and one for Catholic schools.

Much has been written about the supposed distinctiveness of the Scottish education system, which is believed to be fundamental to Scottish culture. The system is founded on democratic and egalitarian values and, in comparison to England, choice is exercised less widely. There are generally stronger links between secondary and feeder primary schools (Campbell, 2000).

In Dundee (and Edinburgh), previous research was carried out by Adler & Raab (1988) concerning the impact of school choice on admissions to secondary schools. Factors influencing choice were noted as geographical distance, school attainment measures and there was some evidence that parents were choosing more 'effective' schools.

In Scotland, parents receive information about the designated school that their child will attend. The principal of their future secondary school will be automatically informed about the student's progress in order to arrange suitable courses. Together with the information about the school, parents receive a form that they may use to request an alternative school. Refusal of a placing request is mostly based on oversubscription of the desired school. The parents can then decide to put their child on a waiting list. In the event of refusal parents can make an appeal. The Education Authority (EA) can suggest an alternative school.

From the interview with the responsible officer at the EA, it became clear that although parental right to choose is recognized, '*local policies encourage parents to send their children to the school that serves their local community*'. Sometimes the EA facilitates choice without the need for placing requests, by assigning catchment areas to more than one school, in order to limit the number of placing requests. Two or three primary schools in the city and quite a few in the countryside are assigned to more than one secondary school. This has been arranged in order to protect schools that were becoming smaller.

Most Dundee schools' maximum intake is never achieved because their capacity is based on the demographic situation in the 1970s and there has been a decreasing birth rate since then. Consequently, most schools are undersubscribed in a formal sense. In some cases, under-subscription can lead to closure of schools. However, the disappearance of schools is strongly opposed politically. In Dundee 20% of students enter secondary school on the basis of a placing request (2001–2002).

#### THE STUDY

Given this policy background the study presented in this paper involves an international comparison between the different choice contexts in the Netherlands and Scotland. The empirical data-collection was carried out in 1996 and 1997 as part of a larger PhD study. More recent additional data were used. The contrasts between the Netherlands and Scotland make such a comparison interesting. These two countries represent different choice situations: the Netherlands always offered a large amount of school choice and catchment areas for secondary schools were never officially established. Possibilities for choice were historically minimal in Scotland, but have increased rapidly over the last decade and especially since about 1988. Ironically, Scottish parents have had rather stronger rights to choose schools for their children than their English counterparts (Adler & Raab, 1988), although initial legislation was imported from England.

The central and local authorities in Netherlands and Scotland generally approve of the idea of choice; however, it is in the actual functioning of choice on a day-to-day basis that their real attitude becomes visible. There are always differences between formal policy goals and actual execution of policy measures, but in an international comparative perspective the presence of such differences can be highlighted. From the information collected by the comparative case studies three types of differences can be distinguished between the availability of choice, as formally stimulated and propagated by the government, and the actual operation of choice in the local choice situation. These differences are:

- demand-side characteristics of choice (availability of transport, information),
- the supply-side of choice (opportunities for choice, admission criteria),
- autonomy (financial and administrative) experienced by schools.

At first sight these differences may seem arbitrary, but they play an important role in the actual functioning of choice. Hirsch (1994) used a similar distinction between demand-led or competitive choice, the aim of which is to encourage competition, and supply-led or pluralistic choice, the aim of which is to increase the range of schools available.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focuses on the transfer between primary and secondary education. The local choice situations (the unit of analysis) are not required to be representative of their country, but are merely examples of a typical choice situation in either country. The internal and construct validity were improved by seeking standardisation between interviews (to avoid contamination), systematic data analysis (to avoid biased viewpoints), and the use of categories of differences. Comparative case studies were carried out in Rotterdam and Dundee.

Each of the selected areas lies in regions of high population densities. These were selected to ensure that in both situations there is a choice between two or more secondary schools. Formally, Dutch schools receive encouragement to enlarge the possibilities for choice, whereas Scottish schools receive only very little encouragement. However, the actual differences between both countries may be less diverse. Sometimes the actual possibilities may be more generous than formal policy indicates. Sometimes the similarities between policy schooling in the Netherlands and Scotland are striking: both have denominational schools as part of the State school system and both countries have egalitarian ethos, albeit one now diminishing.

Three secondary schools providing a similar educational curriculum were selected within each of the local choice situations. This was in order to ensure comparability

between the schools. The schools had to be equivalent alternatives. In each of the countries, the most common type of school was researched. In the Netherlands, three secondary schools were selected with a *mavo-havo-vwo* curriculum, the most widespread type of school in the Netherlands at the time of the research. In Scotland, mixed comprehensive state schools were selected, each with similar educational provision.

Figure 1: The case study schools

		No. of interviews	No. of students	No. of feeder primary schools
<b>Rotterdam</b> (local government)		1		
Public school	NI1	2	1500	80–90
(including Greek & Latin)				
Public school	NI2	3	1200	70–75
(offering English stream and bilingual vwo)				
Private, Protestant school	NI3	2	750	45–50
<b>Dundee</b> (representative of EA)		2		
EA School	SC1	2	611	3 (+2) <sup>3</sup>
EA School (Roman Catholic)	SC2	2	736	4(+10)
EA School (with a special unit)	SC3	1	889	3(+7)
Total number of interviews		15		

The case studies were conducted through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (policymakers and school leaders) and document analysis (brochures published by the schools and the local educational authorities<sup>3</sup>). In addition, for every school approximately two first year school classes filled in a questionnaire investigating their reasons for school choice and their original primary school. Before an international comparison is possible, the local choice situations have to be described briefly within their contexts of the national choice situation, including relevant alterations in these situations. After these descriptions this article continues with a comparison between both countries for each of the categories (Teelken, 1998).

#### COMPARING THE LOCAL CHOICE SITUATIONS

On the basis of this international comparison differences emerge between the formal availability of choice and its actual presence in the school system. For each of the differences, the specific local choice situations are discussed within the framework of the national choice system both in terms of the formal and the actual school choice available.

#### THE DEMAND-SIDE OF CHOICE

There is no organised **transport** to secondary schools in the Netherlands. Students walk, cycle or travel by public transport. In Scotland transport to allocated schools beyond a certain distance is provided by the EA. On the basis of a questionnaire

filled in by a sample of first year students in the 6 case study schools, it can be concluded that in Rotterdam nearly all students travel by themselves, most often by bike (42%) or public transport (38%) while in Dundee most students (59%) walk. When parents make a placing request in Dundee, they simultaneously have to acknowledge that they will be responsible for transport. If parents opt for a non-designated school, they may be offered at most only the cost of transport to their originally designated school. This implies that the local authorities are not encouraging choice.

Concerning the provision of **information**, since November 1997 examination results have been publicly available through the Website and the Choice Guide for secondary education in the Netherlands (Agerbeek, 1999). The Parents' Charter in Scotland (SOED, 1995) states that parents have a right to information about education and schools in their area. Although information provision to parents has increased, it is still controlled and its availability is limited. The provision of league-table information is a contentious issue. It appears that only a small minority of parents takes it seriously into account when choosing a school. The introduction of league tables had unintended consequences according to two respondents: it narrows down the criteria for defining success of a school and it *'has a dispiriting effect on schools in working-class catchment areas'*— schools which will find it difficult to go up the league tables.

The local choice situation in Rotterdam conforms to the general tendency in the Netherlands to provide more information to students and parents. What is unique to Rotterdam is that *all* schools, public as well as private, present themselves in a collective brochure (Voortgezet Onderwijs Rotterdam, 1994). The schools appreciate the collective brochure very much. There are agreements between the schools to limit the amount of advertising. The schools particularly try to provide information about their unique features. Both the public schools studied try to maintain the quality of their student intake by targeting students from private nondenominational primary schools and public Montessori or Jenaplan schools. They also supply bilingual education (teaching in English as well as Dutch) and an English stream (English only). This attracts the more able students. For the lower-level students, school N13 provides longer school days, allowing students to do their homework at school. This system is especially attractive to students from ethnic minorities, because often their parents can offer them less support.

The three Scottish schools send out brochures to the feeder schools in January. The secondary schools are obliged to do this under the Parents' Charter. In addition to that, the school principals visit their feeder schools and organise open evenings for their future students. The schools can only influence a small share of the information parents and students receive about them, because most of the information received goes by reputation and word of mouth. Advertising is allowed but rarely used, as it might be seen as poaching. The law does not permit representatives of the school to visit non-designated primary schools: nor is the school allowed to send out brochures to non-designated students. Parents from non-feeder primary schools usually contact the school directly, on their own initiative. In order to enter the school, this group of parents has to make a placing request through the education authority.

The Dundee league tables are available to the public. These league tables show raw scores only, but explain in detail why those raw scores make comparisons between schools difficult. As the Head of Sc1 explains, *'their only purpose could be to enable comparisons over a couple of years'*. When based on small student numbers, which is often the case in Scotland, such scores are very unreliable. Raw scores say more about the nature of the catchment area — whether it is middle or working class — than the actual quality of the school. Improvements in the league table say more about the schools' ability to attract more able students than about the motivation of students and staff. Scottish respondents are in favour of value-

added scores, although these are very difficult to measure and to produce. However, such scores would create more pressure to improve. They would also give more satisfactory and reliable information to parents, many of whom currently do not understand league tables and do not use the information in their choice decisions. Given these limitations, it appears that league tables fail in their purpose, which is to give information about the quality of the school. League tables only have meaning if one knows the background of the school, its area and history. Otherwise, the scores simply serve to confirm existing beliefs.

#### COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FORMAL AND ACTUAL SITUATION

In Rotterdam, the local authority deliberately encourages the provision of information to potential students and parents; in Dundee, even sending information to non-feeder schools is seen as a threat to other secondary schools. Information provision in Rotterdam, in the form of a brochure in which every school presents itself, aims at informing the students and parents about the individual identity of the schools, thereby stimulating a deliberate choice based on educational diversity (see Figure 2 below) between schools.

*Figure 2: Categories of differences between the formal and actual choice situation*

<b>Description of the categories</b>
<p>1. The demand-side of choice consists of:</p> <p>Availability of <b>transport</b>: The extent to which transport or coverage of transport costs is available to students for travelling to designated and non-designated schools.</p> <p>Availability of <b>information</b>: The amount of general and outcome-based information about schools and about the school choice process available to present and future students and parents.</p> <p>2. Supply-side of choice consists of:</p> <p>The actual opportunity to choose between different schools, diversity of supply, including involvement in the educational curriculum: Variety in educational provision (educational diversity) and the different administrative types of schools available (institutional diversity).</p> <p>The <b>admission criteria</b> for students: absolute criteria refer to certain criteria students have to fulfil in order to enter the school, in terms of catchment area or academic ability. The relative criteria apply only if there are more applications than places available at a school.</p> <p>3. <b>Financial autonomy</b>:</p> <p>The extent to which finance is controlled locally and based on student numbers. A distinction can be made between the financial basis and the method of funding.</p> <p><b>Administrative autonomy</b>: The degree of autonomy experienced by the individual schools.</p>

In Dundee, collective publication of information is limited to outcome-based results, such as league tables. If parents want to obtain information about any non-designated secondary schools, they have to contact the school directly.

#### THE SUPPLY-SIDE OF CHOICE

In the Netherlands, opportunities for choice have always been large, because there are no geographical barriers between schools. *Everybody has to choose*. In Rotterdam, the formal availability of school choice is large, because of the freedom of choice and the large number of diverse schools. The schools in Rotterdam put effort into making the students from primary schools familiar with the range of secondary schools available, because their intake is uncertain. School NL1:

‘it is school policy to offer a varied package, a sort of salad with beneficial elements mixed with enjoyable elements’.

The schools in Rotterdam apply absolute **admission criteria** (see Figure 2 above) in terms of academic ability. The schools deal with student admissions themselves.

When discussing the actual organisation of choice, the three schools in Rotterdam argue that they only admit students with a minimal mavo recommendation. However, a check of the first year students’ list proves that this is not always true. Denominational schools are allowed to admit students on an ideological basis, although school NI3 has not used that opportunity with the result that only about 10 percent of the students are still Protestant. However, even though many denominational schools do not select on an ideological basis, the public schools feel that this opportunity makes the system unfair, because it is still easier for private schools to refuse students. In Rotterdam, relative admission criteria rarely play a role (see Figure 2 above) when schools are oversubscribed. The schools work on a first-come, first-served basis.

In Dundee, formal availability of choice is accompanied by over capacity in most of the schools. This means that placing requests are often granted. The representative of the EA in Dundee made clear that choice is not stimulated. He acknowledges that parents should have a right to choose, like choosing other services. However, the EA thinks that parents should send their children to their local school as much as possible in order to maintain a sense of community. Further, if choice becomes the norm, some schools may suffer and may eventually close. The Dundee EA is not against choice, but is conscious of the difficulties it may cause: if parents choose, it is for a better school, a better area and a better environment. This leads to the *‘accidental and indirect creation of magnet schools’*.

School Sc2 does not make any deliberate effort to contact students from other schools: *‘you don’t do that, you don’t poach’*. The school does not get into contact with non-associated schools. This is based on agreements between the schools that are strictly adhered to:

‘It is inappropriate and unfair to attract students from other schools’.

‘If any other school were to go into our feeder primaries, we would get in touch with the Education Office.’ (Headteacher, Sc2)

School Sc3 explained that there is free school choice in a formal sense, provided the schools are not full, although parents must then pay for their children’s transport.

In Rotterdam, diversity between schools is great and still increasing. Diversity used to take the form of institutional diversity (see Figure 1) between schools, based on religion and denomination, but it is now increasingly based on individual differences between schools, which are emphasising their individual characteristics. Dundee, on the other hand, has a uniform system of schools. Even Catholic schools are completely incorporated into the state system. Diversity between schools is and remains small because of the reorganisation into a comprehensive system, the failure of self-governing schools and the introduction of national guidelines: Scotland has been subject to a system of national guidelines since 1989. Although schools are not obliged to adhere to these guidelines, nearly all schools do use them. However mainly because of the homogeneous character of Scottish education, the Scottish



respondents noted that the lack of educational diversity may mean other differences between schools are emphasised, such as social differences and also those related to reputation.

#### COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FORMAL AND ACTUAL SITUATION

For the schools in Rotterdam, because of the minor role that admission criteria play in the choice procedure, there are few distinctions between the formal and actual choice situations. The only important absolute criterion required by the three schools is the minimum mavo-recommendation from primary school. The schools apply the academic entrance criteria strictly, but apart from that work on a first-come, first-served basis. When the schools do not want to grow any more, they start a waiting list after the first year classes have been filled up. Choice is compulsory and deliberate choices are stimulated and invited.

It is becoming clear that in Dundee choice is not particularly encouraged. The local authorities have set up a complicated system of procedures in order to regulate school choice. Arrangements are so complicated that parents are discouraged from exercising their rights. Local representatives, especially, are eager to explain the disadvantages of choice. The EA in Dundee fears the creation of magnet schools and subsequent increased differences between schools, because parents choose mainly for social reasons. The representative called this the '*antithesis of comprehensive education*'. The EA wants equal opportunities to a rich and diverse curriculum for every student in every school; choice does not encourage that, according to the EA in Dundee. Although the Scottish school principals are not as negative about choice as the local representatives are, they do not put any deliberate effort into choice nor do they contact non-feeder primary schools. They find that choice leads to discontinuity and uncertainty for the secondary schools, because the students from non-designated schools are unknown to them until September.

From a comparison of the local choice situations, it can be concluded that in Rotterdam choice is compulsory and that parents and students can choose between an extensive range of schools. Emphasis is laid on educational diversity, while institutional diversity is becoming less and less important. In Dundee, it is becoming quite clear that choice is neither encouraged nor appreciated. It is tolerated because it is enforced by legislation, but parents seem to be confused by bureaucratic procedures. There is not much educational or institutional diversity, nor is this being stimulated or increased. As the local authorities can refuse placing requests on the basis of staff or accommodation constraints, entering a popular school is very unlikely. However, because most schools are undersubscribed, the actual availability of choice is larger than expected

#### FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE AUTONOMY

The schools in Rotterdam have obtained more **autonomy** over the last couple of years. The local authority in Rotterdam has provided a framework within which individual schools can develop their own policies – in terms of curriculum, finance, staff development and assignment of tasks to different members of staff. However, in general, Heads of schools admit that the increase in autonomy has been limited and sometimes merely cosmetic. Heads explained that although their financial scope increased in a formal sense, the actual amount of money available has not increased. Because of the close link between increased autonomy and tighter financial restraints, schools have experienced regulations as restrictive. Sometimes deregulation leads to even more regulations.

The three most important administrative changes in Scottish education are Devolved School Management (DSM) – which provides in restricted areas some increase in financial autonomy; legislation for schools becoming self-governing, and

the reorganisation of regional authorities into unitary authorities. These authorities have replaced the former regions and districts. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 focused on improving the quality and standard of school education by means of the Inspectorate and through monitoring mechanisms. On the basis of the recent Consultation Draft of the School Education (Scotland) Bill, it can be concluded that, although inspections are taking place, there seems to be a gap in the Ministerial power to ensure that authorities take action to improve their schools, when recommended to do so by the inspectorate<sup>4</sup>. Other recent issues are the increased maturity of devolved school management and partnerships between authorities and the SEED in developing and starting the school estate strategy.

The EA in Dundee does not see a relationship between DSM and placing requests; schools are not supposed to increase their student numbers at the expense of other schools. The EA is very supportive of DSM, because it enables schools to make their own individual decisions. In Dundee, Devolved School Management was phased in between 1993 and 1997. The regions are obliged to identify the different 'heads of expenditure' and to determine, in consultation with the school board, which decisions are related to the individual school and can be taken by the school principal. The Scottish Office laid down that at least 80 percent of the budget should be devolved to the school principal or the school boards. The Dundee authority devolved only material costs, not staffing.

School Sc2 has entered the DSM scheme and explained that 'things have changed'. The cost of books, materials, postage, minor improvements and furnishing are devolved to the school. For the last two items, being devolved is '*rather nice*', Sc2 explained. The school can make its own decisions, which can be put into effect quickly. Sc2 thinks that it makes the school more conscious of its expenditure, although the principal realises that he is an educator and not a trained accountant or an engineer. The school did receive extra clerical staff with the introduction of DSM.

Self-governing legislation, the Scottish equivalent of the Grant Maintained schools in England, never gained support in Scotland; only a few schools actually tried to opt out of local control because they were threatened with closure. The Dundee schools all agree that self-governing status is definitely not a realistic possibility. '*A self-governing school would become an outsider in the local area*'. The national government (before the Labour government assumed power in 1997) tried to persuade schools to opt out, to become directly funded by them, by-passing the local authority. The schools are generally satisfied with the EA: it supports a good system of local government, good education departments and a fair allocation of resources. Self-governing schools have ceased to exist in Scotland since the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000.

#### COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FORMAL AND ACTUAL SITUATION

The schools in Rotterdam experienced some increased financial differences between schools, but these were small. Because students from ethnic minorities are favourably funded, the three researched schools are relatively well off. The Principals of the schools explained that their actual scope for financial decision-making has not increased extensively. Encouraged by local policies, the schools are increasingly stressing their distinctive features. Their increased autonomy has led to more diversity between schools. Generally, the schools have developed different profiles, for example an international school, and some schools have developed a unique school culture and ethos. With their increased autonomy and the introduction of block grant funding, schools have become more dependent on a stable student intake.

The schools in Dundee appreciate their increased financial autonomy, but school principals have to perform more and more tasks they are not trained for. One school expects that the increased financial autonomy will only be limited, as most of the spending is reserved for wages anyway. In Dundee, there is little evidence that this

autonomy is used to offer students more diverse options for choice by allowing schools to grow or to develop individual school profiles. Popular, oversubscribed schools feel no such encouragement at all, as can be confirmed by the study of Adnett and Davies (2000).

In Dundee, self-governing legislation has had few consequences. The political situation of the unitary authorities determines the future of the schools. The Principal of school Sc3 believes that self-governing legislation involves greater autonomy for the schools: *'how you actually organise it as a school is your own business, provided you do not exceed the total number of staff'*. There is encouragement for more organisational autonomy - as long as one keeps to the general rules such as the minimal curriculum guidelines. Nevertheless, autonomy remains within prescribed limits, as staffing takes up most of the budget.

Both local choice situations have witnessed an increase in autonomy for the individual schools. Generally, the schools seem to appreciate this freedom for decision-making capacity outside the power of the local authority. There is little evidence that the Scottish schools are putting more effort into attracting more students or certain groups of students, or that the actual opportunities for choice are more elaborate.

#### CONCLUSION

The differences between the formal and the actual situation allow us a more detailed view of the functioning of choice. Overall choice seems to be favoured. However, focussing on the characteristics of choice clarifies where choice is really being encouraged and where it is not.

*Figure 3: Differences between formal and actual choice in the comparative case studies*

<b>Differences</b>	
<b>1. The demand-side of choice</b>	<p>R. No organised transport, increase in output-based information, extensive educational diversity.</p> <p>D. No transport arrangements to non-designated schools, availability of information about non-designated schools limited, little increase in choice between educationally diverse schools.</p>
<b>2. The supply-side of choice</b>	<p>R. Students are obliged to choose, admission criteria play a limited role.</p> <p>D. Little encouragement to exercise choice, relative admission criteria prohibit the actual exercise of choice.</p>
<b>3. Financial and administrative autonomy</b>	<p>R. Some increase in financial autonomy, stressing of distinctive features.</p> <p>D. Increased financial autonomy, emphasise on material budgets.</p>
R. = Rotterdam & D. = Dundee	

There have been and continue to be extensive opportunities for choice in Rotterdam. In the formal sense these opportunities have not increased over the last couple of years, but the availability of a diverse supply of schools, stimulated by more financial and administrative autonomy, has made choice more interesting.

In Dundee, opportunities have increased in a formal sense. However, although choice has increased at national level, opportunities to use choice have not changed much at the local level, nor is choice encouraged by the local authority. This is illustrated by the limited availability of transport and information and by the bureaucratic procedures that parents have to go through to choose a non-designated school.

From this analysis in a European comparative perspective, it can be concluded that although choice is encouraged in both countries, a more detailed view of the local choice situations provides a diverse picture. In Rotterdam, there are few limitations in the actual availability of choice. The only restriction can be expected from the admission criteria, when schools reach their maximum student capacity. However in Dundee, it is clear that the exercise of choice is not particularly encouraged at local level but because of the large number of undersubscribed schools, actual opportunities for choice may be greater than they seem at first sight.

#### NOTES

1. Dutch secondary education consists of four types of schooling: vbo (junior secondary vocational education, 4-year course), mavo (junior general secondary education, 4 years), havo (senior general secondary education, 5 years) and vwo (pre-university, 6 years). Students are placed in a certain type of schooling according to their abilities. Since August 1999, vbo and mavo have been integrated into vmbo, which offers both a vocational and a more theoretical school curriculum.
2. 2001–2002, Placing requests average figures for Scotland taken from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00244-06.asp>
3. A list of brochures consulted: Department for Education (1992) Choice and Diversity, a new framework for schools. London: HMSO; Gemeente Rotterdam (1993) Uw kind gaat naar de basisschool. Maar naar welke...? [your child will be attending primary school. But which one? Dienst Onderwijs Gemeente Rotterdam, Rotterdam; Lothian Regional Council (undated) Devolved School Management, Information Bulletin, number 2 and 3. 4., Department of Education; Ministerie voor OCW (1996) De basisschool, gids voor ouders en verzorgers [primary school, guide for parents and guardians], OCW: Den Haag, SOED (1995) The parents' charter in Scotland, SOED: Edinburgh; SEED (undated) Choosing a school, a guide for parents. [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk), Hazlehead Academy Founded 1894 (1997) Prospectus for parents; SOED (1993) Devolved School Management, Guidelines for Schemes, Edinburgh, SOED (2001) Choosing a school, a guide for parents. School S1, S2, S3 1996/97 Prospectuses, Dundee; Tayside Regional Council (1994) A guide to Education in Tayside, Education Department, Dundee; Voortgezet Onderwijs Rotterdam (1994) Brochure voor de ouders over het voortgezet onderwijs, aanmelding leerlingen schooljaar 1995-1996, Dienst Stedelijk Onderwijs Gemeente Rotterdam, Rotterdam.
4. [www.seed.uk](http://www.seed.uk).

#### REFERENCES

- Adler, M. (1997) Looking Backwards to the Future: parental choice and education policy. *British Education Research*, 23, 3, 297–313.
- Adler, M. and Raab, G. M. (1988) Exit, choice and loyalty: the impact of parental choice on admissions to secondary schools in Edinburgh and Dundee, *Journal of Education Policy*, 3, 2, 155–179.
- Adnett, N. and Davies, P. (2000) Competition and curriculum diversity in local schooling markets: Theory and evidence, *Journal of Education Policy*, 15, 2, 157–167.
- Agerbeek, M. (1999) Keuzegids Middelbare Scholen, kiezen voor kwaliteit. Zeist: Uitgeverij Kerckebosch.
- Bagley, C. (1996) Black and White Unite or Flight? The Racialised Dimension of Schooling and Parental Choice, *British Educational Research Journal*, 22, 5, 569–580.
- Ball, S., Bowe, R. and Gewirtz, S. (1992) Circuits of schooling: a sociological exploration of parental choice of school in social class contexts, *Sociological Review*, 43, 52–78.
- Blank, R., Levine, R. and Steel, L. (1996) After 15 Years: Magnet Schools in Education. In: *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions and Unequal Effects of School Choice*, ed. by Fuller, B. and Elmore, R. 154–172. New York: Columbia University Teachers College Press.
- Campbell, C. (2000) An Analysis of a 'Scottish Dimension' in the Development of School-based Management. *Scottish Educational Review*, 32, 1, 4–20.

- Chubb, J.E. and Moe, T.M. (1990) *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*. Washington D.C.: Brookings.
- Edwards, A. and Whitty, G. (1992) Parental Choice and Educational Reform in Britain and the United States, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 40, 2, 101–117.
- Gemeente Rotterdam (1993) *Uw kind gaat naar de basisschool. Maar naar welke?* [Your child will be attending primary school. But to which one...?] Dienst Onderwijs Gemeente Rotterdam, Rotterdam.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (1993a) Parents, Privilege and the Educational Market-place. *Research Papers in Education*, 9, 1, 3–29.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (1993b) Values and Ethics in the Education Market Place: The Case of Northwark Park, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 3, 2, 233–254.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (1995) *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gillborn, D. (1997) Racism and Reform: New Ethnicities/Old Inequalities? *British Educational Research Journal*, 23, 3, 345–360.
- Glenn, Ch. (1989) *Choice of Schools in Six Nations*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Gorard, S., Taylor, C. and Fitz, J. (2002) Does School Choice Lead to ‘Spirals of Decline?’ *Journal of Educational Policy*, 17, 3, 367–384.
- Hirsch, J. (1994) *A matter of choice*. Paris: OECD.
- Hirvonoja, P. (2000) *Families in the ‘Public-markets’: School choice in the comprehensive school*. Edinburgh: ECER-paper.
- Holmes, G., DeSimone, J. and Rupp, N. (2003) *Does School Choice Increase School Quality?* (occasional paper). Retrieved from <http://www.ncspe.org/list-papers.php>.
- Karsten, S. and Teelken, C. (1996) School Choice in the Netherlands. *Oxford Studies in Comparative Education*, 6, 1, pp. 17–31.
- Leenknecht, G.J. (1997) *Vrijheid van onderwijs in vijf Europese landen*. Schoordijk Instituut, Centrum voor wetgevingsvraagstukken.
- Parsons, E., Chalkley, B. and Jones, A. (2000) School Catchments and Pupil Movements: a case study in parental choice, *Educational Studies*, 26, 1, 33–48.
- Ranson, S. (1993) Markets or Democracy for Education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 41, 4, 333–352.
- The Scottish Office Education Department (1995) *The Parents’ Charter in Scotland*. Edinburgh: SOED.
- SOED (2002) *Placing in Education Authority Schools in Scotland, 1990/1991–2000/2001*. Retrieved from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins>.
- Teelken, C. (1998) *Market Mechanisms in Education, an international comparative study in the Netherlands, England and Scotland*. UvA: thesis.
- Teelken, C. (1999) School choice in the Netherlands, England and Scotland in a comparative perspective, *Comparative Education*, 35, 3, 283–302.
- Tomlinson, S. (1997) Diversity, Choice and Ethnicity: The Effects of Educational Markets on Ethnic Minorities, *Oxford Review of Education*, 23, 1, 63–76.
- Tooley, J. (1997) Choice and Diversity in Education: A Defence. *Oxford Review of Education*, 23, 1, 103–116.
- Van Dyck, M. (Ed.) (2001) *Onderwijs in de Markt*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.
- Voortgezet Onderwijs Rotterdam (1994) *Brochure voor de ouders over het voortgezet onderwijs, aanmelding leerlingen schooljaar 1995–1996* [Brochure for parents about secondary education, application of students schoolyear 1995–1996], Dienst Stedelijk Onderwijs Gemeente Rotterdam, Rotterdam.
- Walford, G. (1994) *Choice and Diversity in Education*. London: Cassell.
- Walford, G. (1996) School Choice and the Quasi-market, *Oxford Studies of Comparative Education*, 6, 1, 7–15.
- Waslander, S. (1999) *Koopmanschap & burgerschap, marktwerking in het onderwijs*. Lutjebroek: Van Gorcum.
- Weiss, M. and Steinert, B. (1996) Germany: competitive inequality in educational quasi-markets, *Oxford Studies of Comparative Education*, 6, 1, 77–94.
- Whitty, G., and Power, S. (1997) Quasi-markets and Curriculum Control: Making Sense of Recent Education Reform in England and Wales, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 33, 2, 219–241.
- Whitty, G. (1998) New Labour, Education and Disadvantage, *Education and Social Justice*, 1, 1, 2–8.
- Whitty, G., Power, S. and Halpin, D. (1998) *Devolution and Choice in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Whitty, G. (2001) Education, Social Class and Social Exclusion, *Journal of Education Policy*, 16, 4, 287–295.
- Woods, P. (1992) Empowerment through Choice? Towards an Understanding of Parental Choice and School Responsiveness, *Educational Management and Administration*, 20, 4, 204–211.