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Facing increasing financial pressure, the minister-presidents of the federal states agreed in November 1977 to offset the anticipated increase in student numbers by adding new enrollment spots to universities. No provisions were made, however, for more personnel or more space to accommodate greater numbers of students. Thus, the problems of large universities became glaringly obvious.

The Decision for Open Admissions Is Ten Years Old

In order to prevent the expansion of the *numerus clausus*¹ in the Federal Republic, government leaders made a “decision for open admissions” exactly ten years ago. It said that in times of “demand in excess of available spaces” for student admissions, institutions of higher education should “overload,” that is, they should accept far more students than they had originally planned to accommodate. With this, a breakdown in the admissions process was averted – admittedly, often with adverse effects on the quality of education and research.

In order to counter these negative effects, most federal states – exceptions: the city-states of Hamburg and Bremen, which made specific improvements in certain areas – have decided to institute “overload programs,” some with massive increases, in the past few years. According to the West German Rectors’ Conference (WRK), since 1982 these temporary special funds were increased by 500 percent in Schleswig-Holstein, for example, by 200 percent in Bavaria, and by 150 percent each in Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia.

On closer inspection, however, there wasn’t all that much generosity. What was given by one hand was often taken away by the other.

According to surveys by the Science Council, the universities not only lost funding for 2.4 percent of their full-time employees since 1980, in a national comparison, but also, based on 1980 prices, experienced a 4.4 percent drop in the regular funds available to institutions of higher learning nationwide. Of course, the situation varies greatly from state to state. Whereas some state governments have even increased funding, others cut back all the more drastically. Bremen took the most from their universities, with a reduction of 38.8 percent.

¹ Restricted admission to higher education institutions in specific fields of study. Expansion refers to either raising the GPA for admission and/or applying the *numerus clausus* to more fields of study – trans.

The WRK concluded: “The development of the overload programs is positive, but they are almost entirely financed from the pockets of the higher education institutions. The added burden must be carried, not while keeping costs the same, but with reduced funds. Additionally, the state greatly increased its influence on the universities by making corresponding funds available.”

Source: Paul Frangols, “Vor zehn Jahren kam es zum Öffnungsbeschuß” [“The Decision for Open Admissions Is Ten Years Old”], *Die Welt*, January 13, 1987.

Translation: Allison Brown