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**Abstract**

In 2004 the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science set a concrete target: by 2010, close to 50% of the age cohort should participate in higher education, following the targets set in the UK and Sweden. However clear the target is set, the ways to achieve it are far less specified. In the article a number of possible instruments to achieve the target are discussed and their relevance in the Dutch context is analysed. It is concluded that there are a limited number of policy instruments available. However, given the devolution of access policy to the higher education institutions and the influence of broader societal trends on participation our expectations on what government can do to reach its target need to be modest. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)